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ANNIE BESANT

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# THE MIND OF ANNIE BESANT

*by*

THEODORE BESTERMAN

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*" I do not pretend to dictate to you your opinions ; I do not pretend to formulate for you what you shall think, or what you shall reject. On each of you the responsibility of forming his own thought ; on each of you the responsibility of accepting or rejecting, as your own reason, your conscience and your judgment may decide. All that the speaker can do, or has the right to do, is to put the truth as he sees it, leaving it to each individual to accept or to reject, the right and the duty being on each, and not on the one who speaks."*

*Annie Besant, " A Word on Man, his Nature and his Powers "* [1893], ESSAYS AND ADDRESSES : PSYCHOLOGY (*London 1911*), *pp.* 1–2.

*" I do not claim in any way to put forward my views with authority. Let them have such authority as comes to them from the truth they contain. For no honest thinker, no man who believes in God, can desire to wield authority save such authority as truth may give to his utterances ; for there is but one authority in the whole world, and that authority is truth ; and just in proportion as our words accord with the truth eternal will they share that eternal authority that belongs to truth alone."*

*Annie Besant,* THEOSOPHY IN RELATION TO HUMAN LIFE (*Benares and London, 1905*), *p.* 2.

# PREFACE

THIS book is published in honour of Annie Besant's eightieth birthday, and is uniform with *The Annie Besant Calendar*, which is being issued simultaneously. While the object of the *Calendar* is to preserve in a convenient form some of the more striking passages in Annie Besant's works, arranged under suitable headings, the present work is designed to give a systematic exposition of Annie Besant's attitude to some of the chief problems of man and the universe. This has been done as far as possible in Annie Besant's own words ; as in the *Calendar*, and for the same purpose of securing as wide a circulation as possible, quotations containing technical terms have been avoided. Each chapter also contains some account of Annie Besant's practical application of her views, together with references to the chief of her writings on each subject. Taken as a whole, therefore, the book is intended to give a picture of a mind, and of the reflection of that mind in teaching and in activity.

These two books are sent out not only as a token of great and widespread love and reverence, but in the belief that the example of such a life cannot fail to be an inspiration and a guide to all.

I am indebted to the family of the late Dr Hastings and to Messrs T. & T. Clark for permission to reprint Annie Besant's article on "The Theosophical Society" from *The Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*.

TH. B.

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# THE MIND OF ANNIE BESANT

## CHAPTER I

### EDUCATION

ANNIE BESANT often says that the earliest years of education are the most important. The truth of this statement is admirably illustrated by her own life. She was so fortunate, soon after her eighth birthday, as to come under the care of Miss Marryat, who had a system of education which at that time was highly unorthodox. "No words of mine can tell how much I owe her, not only of knowledge, but of that love of knowledge which has remained with me ever since as a constant spur to study." [1]

Miss Marryat devoted her life to the training, according to her system, of children specially selected by her, of whom Annie Besant was one. As this system not only moulded Annie Besant's character, but also had later a great influence when the one-time pupil came to formulate her own educational theories, and as we are speaking of a period of over seventy years ago, it will be interesting to know something more of it. We are

[1] *Annie Besant: an Autobiography* (London 1893), p. 36.

fortunate in having a careful description of it by Annie Besant herself, who writes thus :

" Her method of teaching may be of interest to some, who desire to train children with least pain, and the most enjoyment to the little ones themselves. First, we never used a spelling-book —that torment of the small child—nor an English grammar. But we wrote letters, telling of the things we had seen in our walks, or told again some story we had read ; these childish compositions she would read over with us, correcting all faults of spelling, of grammar, of style, of cadence ; a clumsy sentence would be read aloud, that we might hear how unmusical it sounded, an error in observation or expression pointed out. Then, as the letters recorded what we had seen the day before, the faculty of observation was drawn out and trained. ' Oh, dear ! I have nothing to say ! ' would come from a small child, hanging over a slate. ' Did you not go out for a walk yesterday ? ' Auntie [as Miss Marryat was called by the children] would question. ' Yes,' would be sighed out ; ' but there's nothing to say about it.' ' Nothing to say ! And you walked in the lanes for an hour and saw nothing, little No-eyes ? You must use your eyes better to-day.' Then there was a very favourite ' lesson,' which proved an excellent way of teaching spelling. We used to write out lists of all the words we could think of which sounded the same but were differently spelt. Thus : ' key, quay,' ' knight, night,' and so on, and great was the

glory of the child who found the largest number. Our French lessons—as the German later—included reading from the very first. On the day on which we began German we began reading Schiller's 'Wilhelm Tell,' and the verbs given to us to copy out were those that had occurred in the reading. We learned much by heart, but always things that in themselves were worthy to be learned. We were never given the dry questions and answers which lazy teachers so much affect. We were taught history by one reading aloud while the others worked—the boys as well as the girls learning the use of the needle. 'It's like a girl to sew,' said a little fellow, indignantly, one day. 'It's like a baby to have to run after a girl if you want a button sewn on,' quoth Auntie. Geography was learned by painting skeleton maps—an exercise much delighted in by small fingers—and by putting together puzzle maps, in which countries in the map of a continent, or counties in the map of a country, were always cut out in their proper shapes. I liked big empires in those days; there was a solid satisfaction in putting down Russia, and seeing what a large part of the map was filled up thereby.

The only grammar that we ever learned as grammar was the Latin, and that not until composition had made us familiar with the use of the rules therein given. Auntie had a great horror of children learning by rote things they did not understand, and then fancying they knew them. 'What do you mean by that expression,

Annie?' she would ask me. After feeble attempts to explain, I would answer: 'Indeed, Auntie, I know in my own head, but I can't explain.' 'Then, indeed, Annie, you do not know in your own head, or you could explain, so that I might know in my own head.' And so a healthy habit was fostered of clearness of thought and of expression. The Latin grammar was used because it was more perfect than the modern grammars, and served as a solid foundation for modern languages." [1]

From the earliest years of her public work Annie Besant insisted upon the importance of the early years of education. "In every transition-stage of the world's history," she writes in an early pamphlet, "the question of education naturally comes to the front. So much depends on the first impressions of childhood, on the first training of the tender shoot, that it has always been acknowledged—from Solomon to Forster—that to 'train up a child in the way he should go' is among the most important duties of fathers and citizens." [2] For this reason Annie Besant took up a strong stand against the teaching to children of sectarian and one-sided religious doctrines. And against such teaching she made a passionate and eloquent plea in a passage which, for sentiment, sincerity and expression, is one of the finest in all her works.

[1] *Annie Besant: an Autobiography* (London 1893), pp. 36–38.

[2] Annie Besant, *On the Religious Education of Children* (London [1874]), p. 3.

"True religion," she writes, "consists not only in feelings towards God, but also in duties towards men: the first, noble and blessed as they are, should, in every healthy religion, give place to the second; for a morally good man who does not believe in God at all, is in a far higher state of being than the man who believes in God and is selfish, cruel or unjust. Error in faith is forgiveable; error in life is fatal. The good man shall surely see God, although, for a time, his eyes be holden; the evil man, though he hold the noblest faith yet known, shall never taste the joy of God, until he turns from sin, and struggles after holiness. Faith first, and then morality, is the war-cry of the churches; morality above all, and let faith follow in good time, is the watchword of Theism; so, among us [that is, among Theists] the principal part of the religious training of our children should be morality; religious teaching may be overstrained, or give rise to self-deception; religious talk may be morbid and unreal; religious faith may be erring, and must be imperfect; but morality is a rock which can never be shaken, a guide which can never mislead. Whether we are right or wrong in our belief about God, whether we are immortal spirits or perishable organizations, yet purity is nobler than vice, courage than cowardice, truth than falsehood, love than hate. Let us, then, teach our children morality above all things. Let us teach them to love good for its own sake, without thought of reward, and they will remain good,

even if, in after life, they should alas ! lose all hope of immortality and all faith in God. A child's natural instinct is towards good ; a tale of heroism, of self-sacrifice, of generosity, will bring the eager blood flushing up to a child's face and wake a quick response and a desire of emulation. It is therefore well to place in children's hands tales of noble deeds in days gone by. Nothing is easier than to train a child into feeling a desire to be good for the sake of being so. There is something so attractive in goodness, that I have found it more effectual to hold up the nobility of courage and unselfishness before the child's eyes, than to descend to punishment for the corresponding faults. If a child is in the habit of regarding all wrong as something low and degrading, he quickly shrinks from it ; all mothers know the instinctive ambition of children to be something superior and admirable, and this instinct is most useful in inculcating virtue. Later in life nothing ruins a young man like discovering that morality and religion are often divorced, and that the foremost professors of religion are less delicately honourable and trustworthy than high-minded 'worldly men' ; on the other hand, nothing will have so beneficial an effect on men and women entering life, as to see that those who are most joyful in their faith towards God, lead the purest and most blameless lives. 'Do good, be good,' is, as has been well said, the golden rule of life ; 'do good, be good' must be the law impressed on our children's hearts. Whatever eclipse of

faith' may await England, whatever darkness of most hopeless scepticism, whatever depth of uttermost despair of God, there is not only the hope, but the certainty of the resurrection of religion, if we all hold fast through the driving storm to the sheet-anchor of pure morality, to most faithful discharge of all duty towards man, to love, and tenderness, and charity, and patience. Morality never faileth ; but, whether there be dogmas, they shall fail ; whether there be creeds, they shall cease ; whether there be churches, they shall crumble away ; but morality shall abide for evermore and endure as long as the endless circle of Nature revolves around the Eternal Throne." [1]

A dozen years later Annie Besant completed the outline of her views on education at this period of her life, in one of her earliest writings on Socialism. After arguing for an extension of educational facilities, she continues : "I look forward to a time when every child shall receive in the national schools the elements of a literary, scientific, artistic and technical education ; when neither boy nor girl shall leave the school ignorant of the glories of our literature, of the wonders of science, of the delight in beauty, of some definite means of bread-winning. Be it tailoring or dressmaking, or cookery, or carpentering, or any one of the many trades needed in a civilised society, every pair of hands should be able to do

[1] Annie Besant, *On the Religious Education of Children* (London [1874] ), pp. 12–14.

at least some one thing well, by which a living may be honestly earned. The maturity that follows a youth spent in such training will be useful to the State, and enjoyable to the individual; and such a maturity it should be the object of educational laws to make possible for every citizen." [1]

In later years Annie Besant filled many details into this rough picture of the model education. But from its main outlines she never departed. Thus, writing over a quarter of a century after the publication of the pamphlet last quoted, she says: "Clearly the Theosophical Ideal of Education is that each child who comes into the world should receive an education suited to develop his particular faculties, and also such an education as will make him useful in his future life to his community and to his country." [2]

We must now proceed to an account of Annie Besant's mature views on the nature and purpose of education. But first it is interesting to note that she is no mere theorist in this connection. In the eighties Annie Besant took up the intensive study of science in order to qualify herself for teaching others. She took advanced certificates, one in honours, and thus qualified as a teacher in eight science subjects, although she was refused permission to attend classes at University College on account of her advanced views. Soon after

[1] Annie Besant, *The Redistribution of Political Power* (London 1885), p. 30.

[2] Annie Besant, *The Ideals of Theosophy* (Adyar 1912), p. 36.

she began to teach and, in the midst of her multifarious activities, found time to write excellent text-books on *The Law of Population* (London 1877), *Light, Heat, and Sound* (London 1881), *Physiology of Home* (London 1882), *Electricity* (London 1882), and *Eyes and Ears* (London 1882). In addition she served on the London School Board for the Tower Hamlets division, being elected at the top of the poll. Some of Annie Besant's practical educational work in India is recorded in the chapter on India. Nor have we here the space to give an adequate idea of her labours in the formation of The Theosophical Educational Trust, of the establishment under her inspiration of Theosophical schools in many parts of the world, and, as a climax in her educational activities, of the formation of The Theosophical World-University. It will thus be seen that, apart from all other things, Annie Besant is entitled to speak on the subject of education with an authority based on such experience as very few can ever have had the opportunity of acquiring.

Annie Besant divides the period of education into three parts, in each of which the appropriate teaching should be given. She has summed up the whole matter with admirable succinctness in one of her letters to a young Indian prince, in which she advises him on the right administration of his state. One of these letters is on education, and opens thus : " Let us consider for a moment the object of Education. Is it not to draw out of the child the capacities which he has brought

with him to the world, and so to develop and train these that he may become a healthy and useful member of a civilized society? Unless the education provided for the child is such as develops his faculties and prepares him for his future career in life, it is inadequate and unsatisfactory.

Looking at the educational period, we may consider it as extending over the first twenty-one years of life; but this period will be at present very much shortened necessarily, in the case of all children who are to earn their livelihood with their hands. In a more civilized condition of Society, we may hope that these first twenty-one years will be wholly dedicated to the preparation of boys and girls for their life-work, but we have to shape our educational plan to fit existing circumstances, Society as it is, not Society as it shall be. But, in any case, it is well to bear in mind that this period should, normally, be divided educationally into three terms; from 1–7, the physical health and the development of the body should be the chief care of the parent and teacher; the whole future life depends on the care bestowed on these first seven years; nothing in later years can fully make up for insufficient food, light, exercise, sleep, during this time. Secondly, this is the period for cultivating observation, for training the senses into alertness, accuracy and grasp, for evolving deftness of finger, of learning by heart—the word-memory being in childhood very quick and also very retentive. Nursery rhymes remain in the memory for life, and

rhymes embodying successions of events, or names, or dates, learned in childhood, are never forgotten.

No abstract reasoning processes should be forced on the child at this time ; his attention should be directed to the observation of *sequences of facts*, but not to logical processes ; the brain-cells are not sufficiently interrelated to make any train of reasoning intelligible, and there is no object in memorising mental sequences which are not understood by the intelligence. The memorising of a certain number of formulæ is useful as a store to be drawn upon in the future, and as material on which the growing mind may exercise itself at will—as a babe cutting his teeth bites on a rubber or coral ring, or on his own thumb.

From 7–14 the education should be chiefly directed to the development and training of the emotions, and thus to the building of character. Histories consisting largely of biographies, stories of great men of varied types—saints, heroes, martyrs ; political, artistic, literary, philosophical, religious, geniuses ; patriots, philanthropists, leaders in every department of human life—these should inspire enthusiasm and shape the ideals of the developing boy and girl. In this way character will be builded, and the channels of right emotions will be prepared, so that when the great emotional rush which follows the attainment of puberty is upon the youth, that rush will find channels ready to receive it, to render it uplifting

and beneficent instead of degrading and mischievous. In addition to this, History and Biography, Geography, Physiography, Elementary Physics, Chemistry, and Geology—studied practically in the laboratory—Arithmetic and Algebra, not Geometry, should enter into the school curriculum. The third period, from 14–21, should be the time of intellectual development, of hard and strenuous mental labour ; during this, the reasoning faculty should be thoroughly trained by logic and Mathematics, the sense of Duty by Civics ; along one line sciences such as Biology, Physiology, Psychology should be mastered ; on another Literature, Philosophy, Economics ; on yet another Art ; and specialisation should prepare the youth for his future career.

Religious teaching, beginning with easy stories and passing up to Metaphysics, should form part of the whole education ; physical training should be equally all-pervading, both being adapted carefully to the intelligence and the development of the child growing into youth, of the youth into manhood." [1]

Such, in rough outline, is Annie Besant's theory of education. It would require a whole volume to give an adequate picture of that theory in all its details, but if we may select one element of it, as touched upon at the end of the last quotation, for a little further consideration, we may take the

[1] Annie Besant, *Letters to a Young Indian Prince* (Adyar 1921 pp. 1–9.

subject of religious education. The reader will find it interesting and instructive to set beside the eloquent passage from an early pamphlet, the following paragraph written thirty years later : " It may be said : ' If all is religious, why teach religion as a separate subject ? ' A man might as well say : ' If all teaching is scientific—as it should be—why teach science ? ' All branches of human knowledge should be taught, although all knowledge is sacred, and all sciences should form subjects of instruction, although all teaching should be scientific in method. The truths of religion need to be taught as much as the truths of science, but the schoolboy is taught only the accepted dogmas in all ; the college student enters on realms where there is more discussion ; in the outer world the man chooses his own views, according to the knowledge which he has been able to assimilate." [1]

We may now fittingly conclude this chapter by quoting what is perhaps Annie Besant's most recent, as it certainly is not her least eloquent, re-affirmation of her educational faith : " What after all is the object of Education ? To train the body in health, vigor and grace, so that it may express the emotions in beauty and the mind with accuracy and strength. To train the emotions to love all that is noble and beautiful ; to sympathise with the joys and sorrows of others ; to inspire to service ever widening in its area, until

[1] Annie Besant, " Religious Education," *The Birth of New India* (Adyar 1917), p. 141.

we love our elders as our parents, our equals as our brothers and sisters, our youngers as our children, and seek to serve them all ; to find joy in sacrifice for great causes and for the helpless ; to feel reverence for all who are worthy of it, and compassion for the outcast and the criminal. To evolve and discipline the mind in right thinking, right discrimination, right judgment, right memory. To subdue body, emotion, and mind to Spirit, the Inner Ruler Immortal, making the mind the mirror of the Ego, the emotions the mirror of the Intuition, the body the expression of the Will.

To put all this in a single sentence : To make the man a good Citizen of a free and spiritual Commonwealth of Humanity." [1]

Annie Besant has written much on education in addition to works already quoted, most of her books containing some discussion of the subject. The following may be noted : *Education as a National Duty* (Benares 1903), *The Education of Indian Girls* (Benares and London, 1904), *Principles of Education* (Madras 1918), *Education for the New Era* (London [1919]). A number of papers and lectures are collected in *The Birth of New India* (Adyar 1917), pp. 87–196. See also *Theosophical Educational Trust : Report 1916* (Madras 1917). The following works are in the nature of text-books for use in schools and the

[1] Annie Besant, *India : Bond or Free ?* (London and New York, 1926), p. 129.

like : *The Story of the Great War : Some Lessons from the Mahâbhârata* (Benares 1899), *Shrî Râma Chandra, the Ideal King* (Benares and London, 1901), *Hindu Ideals* (Benares and London, 1904), *Sanâtana Dharma : an advanced Text Book of Hindu Religion and Ethics* (Benares 1904), *The Universal Text Book of Religion and Morals* (Adyar 1911–1915, 3 vols.), *Lectures on Political Science* (Adyar 1919). A collection of " tales of noble deeds in days gone by " is *Legends and Tales* (London 1885). See also, among the more recent books, *Civilisation's Deadlocks and the Keys* (London 1924), pp. 58–86 ; *Kamala Lectures : Indian Ideals in Education, Philosophy and Religion, and Art* (Calcutta 1925), pp. 3–35 ; *World Problems of To-day* (London 1925), pp. 73–94 ; *India : Bond or Free ?* (London and New York, 1926), pp. 91–129.

## CHAPTER II

### CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

"SUPPOSING you came with me one day on one of my school board journeys, and supposing I took you down Whitechapel Road, and then down one of the little roads that turn off it, and then into a filthy court in which that road ends. The whole place is covered with rotting vegetables and with filthy fragments of food. I take you down into a cellar where there is no light and no air. No air or sun can get there save through the trap-door, which opens up into the street. A woman is lying there, and she has just given birth to a child. The child is not wanted ; the mother is not glad that she is the mother of the boy ; she only looks on him as an added burden, a new trouble in a miserable life ; she is only a harlot out of the streets. The father—who knows ? some drunken sailor, some thief, some miserable vagabond tramping the streets, who can tell ? There is the child. Go and look at it. Look at the face ; look at the shape of the head ; see how the forehead is shaped. Why, there is no forehead ; the head goes back from the top of the eyebrows. There is no room there for the instrument of the mind, no place, physically, for

intellectual capacities to use as their organ. There is plenty of room at the back of the head for the passions and appetites of the brute. The sociologist who looks at the child says : ' Oh, yes, he is a congenital criminal ; he will grow up and die a criminal, and you cannot do anything with him ; he has brought that with him into the world.'

Who made him ? Who is responsible for him ? Who threw him into that filthy cellar of a London court ? He is going to live in spite of his misery. Nobody helps him to live. He is brought up on blows, not on kisses like happier children. When he is a child of three or four, put your hand out to him as you pass and he shrinks back and puts up his arms or hands as defence. He thinks it is a blow you are going to give him, for no hand is stretched out to him save to give him a blow. He will tell you a lie. If he does not tell lies he gets beaten. He will try to pick your pocket. If he goes home without some stolen thing, to the cellar he calls ' home,' he will be thrashed and sent to bed without supper. He is taught to steal and lie, as you teach your children to be honest and to tell the truth. His little lips use the foulest language. He hears nothing else. Horrible, profane, and filthy words come out from those child-lips. He knows no better, he means nothing by them. It is the language he hears all around him every day and every night. Presently the policeman gets hold of him, brings him before the magistrate. Some-

times so little is he that his head will not come above the bar of the dock, and he has to be put on a stool or a chair so that the judge, who is going to sentence him, can see the child. He is thrown into gaol. He comes out after a few days worse than he went in. Over and over again the same story is told. Back he goes to gaol, until he at last becomes an habitual criminal. What else could he be? He has never had a chance of being anything else. The law to him is enemy; society to him is foe; his hand is against everybody because everybody's hand is against him. And so he goes on from bad to worse; sentence after sentence, degradation after degradation, and at last that miserable creature strikes a blow in anger, as many a blow has been struck at him all his miserable life, and the blow kills. He is arrested for the last time, and for the last time he is tried, and for the last time he is sentenced; and he goes from the dock to the condemned cell, and from the condemned cell to the gallows, and from the gallows to the quicklime of the criminal's grave in the prison yard. . . . He is a victim, not a criminal; he is a helpless straw on the stream of a hopeless destiny." [1]

With such memories as these, and with memories also of the many lawsuits in which she has been involved because of her "advanced" teachings, it is no wonder that Annie Besant has devoted much attention to the problems of crime and punishment. It is difficult to imagine a

[1] Annie Besant, *Australian Lectures* (Sydney 1908), pp. 40–43.

more complete statement of the evolution of a child into a criminal than that in the above quotation. But Annie Besant has given much more detailed study to this matter.

Thus, in one of her earliest pamphlets she writes : "Public opinion in becoming more humane has also become far more just, and society is beginning to conceive it possible that it may owe some positive duties to the criminal. In all young societies the first imperative necessity is that of self-preservation ; the criminal must be punished because he is a danger to society, and the penalty inflicted on him is—perhaps unavoidably—vindictive and retaliatory. 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, blood for blood.' Society has then no time for a long course of reformatory punishment, and in semi-barbarous communities the idea of using punishment for the good of the offender is never found to take root. In most countries the laws of punishment are founded on this idea of retaliation : 'You have hurt me, so I will hurt you, and as I am the stronger I will hurt you most.' This is what society says to the criminal : the natural effect is that the criminal scowls at society, and when he thinks a fair chance of revenge offers itself, *he* takes his turn on the same principle. So the duel continues, till at last, perhaps, the criminal takes a life, and society finishes off the contest by taking his. Anyone who will take the trouble to bestow a little attention on the appearance of prisoners before some court of justice, will notice how the

same criminal is brought up again and again, the offence he is charged with continually darker in character as the conflict between society and himself becomes more bitter." [1] In this passage, as in many more throughout this book, may be noted the really very remarkable continuity of thought and outlook extending over Annie Besant's long life. In the present instance about thirty-five years separate the two quotations just given, yet the recognition of the fundamental issues remains the same.

Before proceeding to note Annie Besant's concrete proposals for the reform of criminology, it is important to record some of her opinions concerning the nature of crime itself. Annie Besant has written a paper on this subject that still remains fresh and valuable after a lapse of over forty years, and that after a period which has seen an unexampled development in the study of criminology and penology. In *Sin and Crime : their Nature and Treatment*, published in 1885, Annie Besant wrote : " I define sin as disregard of moral law. Some people take it as connoting God, or breach of supernatural law. I do not so use it. A word is needed to signify wrongdoing, outside, as well as including, the scope of the criminal law, and the word sin is useful for this purpose. It includes, but goes beyond, all crimes, and I define Crime as breach of a special kind of moral law, of law which is enacted by some authority and enforced by penalty. A crime

[1] Annie Besant, *The Ethics of Punishment* (Bristol 1874), pp. 5-6.

will therefore necessarily be a sin, but a sin need not be a crime.

The words 'law' and 'moral' also require definition. Law is a word which has two meanings, and much confusion often arises from the ambiguity thus occasioned. It means (*a*) observed sequences of phenomena; all 'natural' laws mean this and nothing more. It has been observed that pieces of matter tend to move towards each other; *e.g.*, a stone, unsupported in the air, moves to the ground. The fact that all matter tends thus to move is expressed by the phrase, 'the law of gravitation.' This law is not a command, but a registration. It does not say to matter, 'Thou shalt thus move'; it simply records, 'Matter tends thus to move.'

Law also means (*b*) an enactment, issued by some recognised authority, with a penalty attached to a breach thereof. It says distinctly, 'Thou shalt,' or 'Thou shalt not.'

Law in sense (*a*) cannot be broken, though it may be disregarded; a man who leaps from the height of a tower does not break the law of gravitation; he disregards it, and his mangled limbs as he lies on the ground bear mute witness that the sequence is unbroken. All suffering consequent on disregard of natural law is the result of the law itself remaining unbroken; no arbitrary penalty is attached to the disregard; the results of the disregard prove the infrangibility of the law.

Law in sense (*b*) can be broken; the command

can be disobeyed. And although disobedience may meet with penalty, the penalty has no necessary connexion with the infraction of the law, and may be evaded altogether. A theft, punishable with imprisonment, remains unpunished if the thief be unknown, and the imprisonment is an arbitrary penalty, changeable at will.

The word 'moral' I define, in its narrowest sense, as 'tending to increase the general happiness.' In its wider sense it is applied to all philosophy which deals with conduct. Moral conduct is conduct which tends to increase general happiness. Moral science is science that deals with conduct; distinguishes the tendency of actions on society; marks them with approval or disapproval as they tend to promote or injure the general welfare.

Moral law, then, is law regulating conduct, and may be of either of the two types noted above. Moral law of type (*a*) is the registration of observed sequences of moral phenomena, the scientific statement of human experience in matters of conduct. Moral law of type (*b*) is the code made by man for the regulation of society, for the prevention of actions deemed seriously injurious to the commonwealth, such actions being made punishable by the civil authority. In addition to these clearly defined kinds of moral law, there is a sub-class of type (*a*) which deserves a word of notice; it is of very variable nature, consisting of rules which must be classed as

'moral' in the wide sense since they deal with conduct, but of rules which are the result of limited and partial experience, breaches of which have attached to them the penalty of social disapprobation. This class belongs to type (*a*) in so far as its classification of actions rests on a true induction; its laws, often based on mistaken observations and too limited experience, are apt to class wrongly the tendencies of actions, and so to come into conflict with sound morality.

The vices classed as self-regarding come under the head of sins, but not under that of crimes. Although in the social union no act of an individual is ultimately self-regarding only, yet society wisely only inflicts legal penalty on actions committed by one citizen which are directly injurious to the others. Thus a man who chooses to get drunk in the solitude of his own room commits a sin of the self-regarding order, and remains unpunished by law; but if he gets drunk in the street and becomes disorderly and a public nuisance, he then commits a crime, and incurs a legal penalty." [1]

Here we have a more or less complete analysis of crime, and at the same time a picture of the vast complexity of this subject. In the same pamphlet Annie Besant proceeds to examine the history of the punishment of crime throughout the ages. This is followed by a detailed examination of specific sins or crimes, such as falsehood, unchastity, and the like. After this comes

[1] Annie Besant, *Sin and Crime* (London 1885), pp. 3–5.

analysis of the biological concomitants of crime, which is followed, as may be imagined, by concrete proposals for criminological reform. Here are Annie Besant's considered suggestions on this point, published, it must be remembered, over forty years ago :

" What ought to be done with criminals ? In other words, what is the responsibility of Society to the criminal ? When the first crime is committed, generally in youth, and the criminal comes into the hands of the law, the first duty is to educate him if he be ignorant—as most criminals are. The next duty is to train him to earn an honest living by teaching him a trade, and before he is set free he should be compelled to earn by that trade the full amount which he has cost Society while in prison, and also enough to start him in his trade outside. The time necessary for this will accustom him to habits of steady industry, and in order that he may not be revolted by work, the hours of labour should not be over long, and recreation and healthy amusement should be placed within his reach. The harshness and dulness of prison life now are certain in most cases to lead to the re-action of riot and debauchery when the prisoner is released. If the criminal had committed crime in consequence of a merely undeveloped brain, such training as that suggested would lift him out of the criminal class, and in a vast number of cases this would be found to be the fact. A habit of work and of rational enjoyment would have been

acquired, and no relapse into crime would be probable.

If, however, such relapse took place, it would then be a question whether congenital cerebral deficiency was not at the root of the mischief, and whether the criminal was not, therefore, incurable. There would still remain the possibility that temporary brain-disease, some curable lesion, might be the cause of crime. In either case the sufferer should be remitted to confinement, and kept under restraint for a long term or, if necessary, for life. Just as the mental lunatic is placed in an asylum, so should be placed these moral lunatics ; both suffer from cerebral disease ; we have ceased to torment the ordinary lunatic with the whip and fetters, to put him in a dark cell, to feed him on bread and water ; but we still use these methods with his fellow-patient, whose disease merely affects a different part of the brain, and who, unhappily for him, is suffering from a malady which is supposed to be particularly offensive to God !

Where crimes are of a brutal nature, implying a low type in the committer, it might be well to draft him from the place of restraint into the army, where the discipline would still further train the lower nature, and aid such development as it may be capable of.

In such a system as that proposed, prisons, in the present sense of the word, would be abolished. Their place would be taken by training colleges for the undeveloped natures, and asylums for the

incurably diseased. All the brutalising influence of the prison would disappear, and the fallen would be helped to stand, instead of beaten because they fell.

One enormous advantage which would accrue from the adoption of such treatment as I propose would be the cessation of the manufacture of criminals. Now, some degraded criminal is turned loose from gaol, rushes back to his old haunts, drinks himself mad to celebrate his release, drags some half-drunken prostitute into his embrace, and a new life is born of the union. What can that life be save one which while it lasts is stamped with the shame and the horror of its commencement. And so criminals are bred, and Society steps in to punish, but never to prevent.

And has Society no duty of prevention ere the criminal is to be dealt with? Here, indeed, is the root treatment. . . . Bad houses, bad air, bad food, evil surroundings, acting on natures which inherit the results of similar conditions on past generations, must generate and foster crime. The lower strata of society must be uplifted ere criminals will lessen in number. Out of slums and back courts and alleys, out of filth and overcrowding, out of misery which maddens and destitution which destroys, up into the sunshine and the pure air, into healthy homes and bright surroundings must come these weary victims of inhuman conditions. Crime is the fungus, growing on ordure in the darkness; it will die when

its foul bed is swept away, and when sunlight illumines the darkened depths." [1]

In later years wider knowledge enabled Annie Besant to deepen the foundations of her criminological theories, by basing them on the profounder truths of human psychology. Thus, many years after the last-quoted work, Annie Besant, returning to the subject, divided criminals into two classes. The former of these comprises persons of low development, who in their evolution are not up to the level of the society into which they are born. The other great class (for these broad divisions have, of course, their sub-divisions, since human psychology cannot be stated in such simple terms), consists of persons whose physical or moral or mental make-up is somehow distorted, who, that is, are abnormal, and must be treated as such.

We are concerned, therefore, with the former class only ; this consists of congenital criminals and criminals who are capable of working out their vicious tendencies. In the following passage it will be observed that while Annie Besant has deepened her psychological bases, her practical remedies are almost the same as in her earlier writings.

How, then, she writes, being careful to add that she speaks only for herself, " would I deal with these two classes of the congenital criminal and the undeveloped ego ? First of all, I would hand them over to education. Separate them off

[1] Annie Besant, *Sin and Crime* (London 1885), pp. 20–22.

from the rest of Society to some extent? Yes. But with certain restrictions on their personal liberty, I would make their surroundings healthy, clean, pleasant, not penitential, as we say, but educational. I would give them amusement, give them pleasure, use happiness to make the little seeds of good in them to grow and flower, surround them with encouragement, while not setting them free. I believe that it would be possible to deal with these people in a kind of labour colony into which they should be drafted, after they had been educated and trained in some form of trade, which would enable them to earn a decent living, and not be a burden on the community. I would use restraint, and a certain steady pressure, which should gradually teach them industry, for they will not work of their own accord at first, until there is pressure on them towards work. And I would even go so far that I should be willing to make the rule that you find in the Christian *Testament*, that: 'If any man will not work, neither shall he eat.' If he refused to work, I would support him on the plainest and barest nourishment which would keep him in health, increasing his comforts and enjoyments as he won them by industry. Not too much work, not uninteresting drudgery of labour, but an industry which he would gradually take a pleasure in following, thus winning him, as I would win a child, into the ways of pure life that go with discipline and happiness. And so I should strive to place the undeveloped in these labour colonies,

where they would be treated kindly and respectfully—for you will never have self-respect in a man, unless a man is treated respectfully. Only bit by bit, the human egos would awaken, and the sense of mutual human dependence bring them into discharge of right obligations ; then they would be fit to go out into the freedom of civic life. There is no use of punishment at all in such a colony ; but rather I would attract them onward by reward. The undeveloped would develop more rapidly under that stimulus ; and under love and brotherly treatment, even the congenital criminal would at least have such influences playing upon him as would enable him to utilise these in the after-death existence, and enable him to get a better body when he comes back." [1]

Something ought perhaps to be added on the subject of capital punishment, though this can scarcely be any longer described as a controversial matter, among thoughtful men and women, at any rate. It is appropriate therefore to take our quotation from the earliest of Annie Besant's works cited above. In this she writes : " Many of the arguments used . . . against the use of the cat, when urged as a deterrent, apply also to capital punishment. But here we may also quarrel with the assumption that it *is* a deterrent, for in countries where capital punishment has been given up, either by law or custom, violent offences are on the decrease. . . . *Que messieurs les assassins*

[1] Annie Besant, *The Ideals of Theosophy* (Adyar 1912), pp. 53–56.

*commencent*, laughed a witty Frenchman when the question of the abolition of capital punishment was mooted before him ; but our Frenchman forgot that it is irrational to expect improvement to arise from below ; the example to good must be given from above. So long as Society avenges itself on its worst foes by putting them to death, so long also will private malice avenge itself in the same way. Useless as a deterrent, and a failure in lessening crime, legal murder is also a gross offence against the sanctity of human life, whose sacredness modern civilisation has done so much to promote. To send a man out of the world is a crime against humanity ; it puts for ever out of the service of the race a man or a woman, whose possible future usefulness cannot be guessed at ; it crushes out all hope of reformation for the criminal ; it brutalises the man who is charged with the awful duty of executioner." [1]

Crime and punishment, as well as the law in general and its reform, are touched upon in a number of Annie Besant's books. See also *Civil and Religious Liberty* (London 1883), and *Law* (London [1919]). For some account of Annie Besant's own experience of the law see *In the High Court of Justice* (London [1878]), *Report of Mrs Annie Besant's Suit against the "Daily Graphic"* (London [1921]), and *Annie Besant: an Autobiography* (London 1893), *passim*.

[1] Annie Besant, *The Ethics of Punishment* (Bristol 1874), pp. 21–22.

# CHAPTER III

## FOUR SOCIAL AND HUMANITARIAN PROBLEMS

### i. *The Protection of Animals*

"THE relation of man to the lower animals is but very partially understood, chiefly because animals are generally regarded as 'having no souls,' and hence as being divided from man by an insuperable gulf. In Italy this idea has been carried so far that even cruelty is excused, under the plea 'Non e Christiano,' 'It is not a Christian,' as though the absence of a future life justified the making of the present life miserable! But even among kindly-hearted people there is a very general idea that animals are merely an appendage of man, and that, as it is often phrased, 'God made animals for man's use.' Hence the animal is regarded only in the light of its usefulness to man, and to consider the welfare and evolution of the animal as a separate being would, to most people, savour of the absurd."[1] The general position could not be better stated.

Elsewhere, in an address to an Indian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Annie

[1] Annie Besant, "Men and Animals" (1903), *Essays and Addresses: Evolution and Occultism* (London 1913), p. 290.

Besant made a detailed analysis of the various directions in which animals are ill-treated in India.[1] Among these may be noted the hobbling of grazing animals, the excessive burdening of donkeys, the overloading of carts, and so on. These examples are enough to show that in the East as in the West the sufferings caused to animals are due not so much to deliberate cruelty as to sheer thoughtlessness. From this fact it is obvious that the only way to end such thoughtless cruelty, is to awaken those who commit it to a sense of what they are doing. To this work Annie Besant has devoted much time.

Speaking of the proposed formation of an Imperial League for the Protection of Animals, Annie Besant remarked that she was glad to note that its chief work would be persuasive and educational rather than punitive. "You cannot go with punishment in one hand and argument in the other. You have to touch the heart with your appeal, and the brain with your reasoning; and if you are threatening, if you hold up the rod of the law, then the brain becomes bewildered and the heart terrified, then the argument and reasoning fail to move the culprit. Therefore, the great work of the League will be to unite together all agencies and supply any gaps in their working. The great endeavour of the new League will be to make every member of the community feel his duty. That is the first thing to do. There is

[1] Annie Besant, *On the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (Adyar 1910); see also *id.*, *On the Protection of Animals* (Adyar 1910).

not one person in this hall who has it not as a religious and moral duty upon him to stop cruelty wherever he sees it. If you are determined it shall not be, cases of cruelty will no longer be found in this city. The fault is not so much with the ignorant, foolish people who strike the animals they are driving. The fault is with us, with you and with me, who see an animal tortured and pass by on the other side, leaving the animal to suffer unregarded and uncared for. The man who is cruel needs to be helped as well as the animal who suffers. It is far worse to inflict cruelty than to suffer it, and the man who tortures is an object of greater compassion even than the tortured animal. Indignation makes people forget that. But never yet was an evil cured by an evil. If you go in an angry mood yourself to rebuke an angry man, what does he say in his heart? 'You are angry, and I am angry, and we use the same means to show the same feeling.' But if you go up to him as a friend and brother, if you say to him: 'My brother, that animal you are torturing has the same life as you and shares your own nature'; if you plead in this way instead of threatening, if you explain instead of menacing, then you have won a human heart as well as saved an animal, and the man will be tender in the future. Whereas if you attack him, he will strike the animal again when you are out of sight and he is no longer afraid. There lies our path. In a little society we Theosophists have for the Protection of Animals, every member

takes a pledge every morning that he will stop, or do his best to stop, any act of cruelty towards animals which he sees during the day. It is not necessary to enter a Society in order to make that promise to yourself, and to carry it out. But why should we do it? We should do it not only because there is but One Life, and because that Life is wronged in every animal that is hurt. Not only because those who injure animals are injuring their Lord, but also because the whole level of a community depends on the human qualities that are developed in it; and compassion to the weak and the helpless is the quality that separates the man from the brute. And there is one thing it seems to me that you should remember —Where the strong and the weak are face to face, all the rights are on the side of the weak and the duties on the side of the strong. People say: 'We have rights over the animals. They are given to us for use.' You have no rights over them. You have duties towards them; and your duty is to train and educate them, so that the animals in your hands may be better than the animals that have not had human help and training." [1]

This whole line of reasoning, which shows forth a rare union of wisdom and common-sense, has been admirably summed up by Annie Besant herself, in the following words: "Man must gradually learn to regard himself as the divinely

[1] Annie Besant, *On the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (Adyar 1910), pp. 6–8.

appointed ruler of the animal world, using his great powers to raise and train his subjects, not to crush and terrify them. He must cease to look on them as existing only for his use and comfort, and regard them as his infant brethren in the divine family, knowing that he is the representative to them of the Divine Being, to whom he must answer for the exercise of the kingship placed in his hands." [1]

### ii. *Vivisection*

Closely connected with the subject just discussed, but introducing new factors, is the practice of vivisection. Of her early pamphlet on this subject Annie Besant writes as follows, with characteristic frankness : " One incident of that autumn [of 1881] I record with regret. I was misled by very partial knowledge of the nature of the experiments performed, and by my fear that if scientific men were forbidden to experiment on animals with drugs they would perforce experiment with them on the poor in hospitals, to write two articles, republished as a pamphlet, against Sir Eardley Wilmot's Bill for the ' Total Suppression of Vivisection.' I limited my approval to highly skilled men engaged in original investigations, and took the representations made of the character of the experiments without sufficient care to verify them. Hence the publication of

[1] Annie Besant, " Men and Animals " (1903), *Essays and Addresses : Evolution and Occultism* (London 1913), pp. 294–295.

the one thing I ever wrote for which I feel deep regret and shame, as against the whole trend and efforts of my life. I am thankful to say that Dr Anna Kingsford answered my articles, and I readily inserted her replies in the paper in which mine appeared—our *National Reformer*—and she touched that question of the moral sense to which my nature at once responded. Ultimately, I looked very carefully into the subject, found that vivisection abroad was very different from vivisection in England, saw that it was in very truth the fiendishly cruel thing that its opponents alleged, and destroyed my partial defence of even its less brutal form." [1] One is bound to add that no one reading the pamphlet referred to,[2] so hedged round with qualifications in its approval of vivisection, could condemn it so emphatically as its writer does.

In a lecture delivered in India Annie Besant made an effort to keep the practice of vivisection out of that country. And in so doing she traced the development of the practice, its alleged benefits, and so on, ridiculing the practice of " introducing into the human body a filthy fluid, supposed to guard it against small-pox infection, but very often carrying with it germs of disease far more loathsome than the small-pox. . . . If you want to make the body healthy, you should follow the laws of health, cleanliness and purity, and show care in the ordinary matters of external

[1] *Annie Besant: an Autobiography* (London 1893), pp. 271–272.
[2] Annie Besant, *Vivisection* [London 1881].

decency and external life. You will oppose disease in that way far better than by poisoning the body. For by the beginning of this practice by introducing one disease after another, as some doctors desire to do, you set up a new cycle of mischief, and simply substitute one form of mischief for another." [1] But, Annie Besant points out, the suffering created by the practices of inoculation and vaccination was comparatively small, many of the experiments being carried out on human beings, who often voluntarily submitted to them.

In the course of time, however, experiments began to be carried out for no apparent end, and to re-establish facts already established. "For instance, a dog will be taken and laid living on the dissecting table,[2] then the nerves will be exposed along the neck and under the skin of the legs, and so on ; or the bones of the skull are removed and certain parts of the brain stimulated ; and while strapped down in this condition, a sudden injury may be caused by the application of a red-hot iron, to a particular part of the brain, and the dog will bark, and then the Professor will brutally say to the public : 'See how we can make the dog bark by stimulating this particular portion of the brain.' Now if it be of the smallest value to any human being to know that a dog barks when a

[1] Annie Besant, *Against Vivisection* (Benares 1903), pp. 4–5. See also, *id.*, *Vivisection in Excelsis* (Adyar 1910).

[2] [It is only fair to say that in England such "experiments" as this are now almost invariably performed under anæsthetics].

particular portion of the brain is in action, surely it must have satisfied intellectual curiosity to have proved this once for all ; but to do it over and over again simply to prove what everybody knows, is not only to torture the criminal, but to brutalise the conscience and hearts of the young men, who learn to see agony with indifference and curiosity as they watch the writhings of the tortured brute." [1]

This is bad enough, but far worse cases of vivisection are cited, and these in themselves should be enough to revolt any reasonable person against the practice. But apart from this, is vivisection of any use ? Annie Besant answers this question categorically in the negative, and gives ample reasons for so doing. But we need not enter into that, for she proceeds to what is, after all, the strongest argument of all, the moral. " But suppose their arguments were true, suppose it were true that you and I, my brothers, could be saved from a disease that threatened the body by the torture of the brute, could be rescued from death by the agony of the lower animal. Are you prepared to pay that price for a few years longer of the body ? Are you prepared to trample on mercy in order that your physical life may be made a few weeks or months or years longer than otherwise it would be ? " [2] That is the final and unanswerable argument against vivisection.

[1] Annie Besant, *Against Vivisection* (Benares 1903), pp. 7–8.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

### iii. *Vegetarianism*

Here we have again a subject involving the welfare of animals, but again introducing new factors. It is not proposed to consider here the positive arguments for vegetarianism, that is, the greater value of cereals and fruits as compared with flesh foods. It is only proposed to give a few quotations from a lecture by Annie Besant to illustrate the negative arguments for vegetarianism, that is, arguments for abstaining from meat. In this lecture Annie Besant is discussing the matter from the Theosophical point of view, and first re-states the arguments we have already noted, namely, man's responsibility to the animals, as the strong to the weak. We are then invited to visit in thought a slaughter-house :

" Try to estimate, if you can, by imagination—if you have not been unfortunate enough to see it in reality—something of the passions and emotions which there are aroused, not for the moment in the man who is slaying—I will deal with him presently—but in the animals that are being slain ! Notice the terror that strikes on them as they come within scent of the blood ! See the misery, and the fright, and the horror with which they struggle to get away even from the turning down which they are being driven ! Follow them, if you have the courage to do it, right into the slaughter-house, and see them as they are being slain, and then let your imagination go a step further, or, if you have the subtle power of sensing actual vibrations, look,

and remember what you see : images of terror, of fear, of horror, as the life is suddenly wrenched out of the body, and the animal soul with its terror, with its horror, goes out into the astral world to remain there for a considerable period before it breaks up and perishes. And remember that wherever this slaughtering of animals goes on you are there making a focus for all these passions of horror and of terror, and that those react on the material world, that those react on the minds of men, and that anyone who is sensitive, coming into the neighbourhood of such a place, sees and feels these terrible vibrations, suffers under them, and knows whence they are."[1]

Annie Besant then proceeds to enlarge on this theme as illustrated by such a centre of animal-slaughtering as Chicago. But let us pass on to the men who slay the animals. " I suppose," Annie Besant proceeds on this point, " I suppose no one will contend that it is a form of business which he himself would very gladly take up if he be either an educated or refined man or woman—for I do not know why women should be left out of this, as they figure largely amongst meat-eaters. I presume that very few men and very few women would be willing to go and catch hold either of sheep or of oxen and themselves slaughter the creatures in order that they may eat. They admit that it has on the person who does it a certain coarsening influence. So much

[1] Annie Besant, *Vegetarianism in the Light of Theosophy* (Adyar 1913), pp. 14–15.

is that recognised by law that certainly in the United States—I don't know if the law is the same here—no butcher is permitted to sit on a jury in a murder trial. . . . Has it ever struck you as a rule in ethics that you have no right to put upon another human being for your advantage a duty that you are not prepared to discharge yourself? It is all very well for some fine and delicate and refined lady to be proud of her delicacy and refinement, to shrink from any notion, say, of going to tea with a butcher, to certainly strongly object to the notion of his coming into her drawing-room, to shrink altogether from the idea of consorting with such persons, 'So coarse, you know, and so unpleasant.' Quite so, but why? In order that she may eat meat, in order that she may gratify her appetite; and she puts on another the coarsening and the brutalising which she escapes from herself in her refinement, while she takes for the gratification of her own appetite the fruits of the brutalisation of her fellow-man. Now, I venture to submit that if people want to eat meat, they should kill the animals for themselves, that they have no right to degrade other people by work of that sort. Nor should they say that if they did not do it the slaughter would still go on. That is no sort of way of evading a moral responsibility. Every person who eats meat takes a share in that degradation of his fellow-man; on him and on her personally lies the share, and personally lies the responsibility. And if

this world be a world of law, if it be true that law obtains not only in the physical, but also in the mental and the moral and the spiritual world ; then every person who has share in the crime has share also in the penalty that follows on the heel of the crime, and so in his own nature is brutalised by the brutality that he makes necessary by his share in the results that come therefrom." [1]

There are still other arguments that can be advanced against the slaughtering of animals for food, and Annie Besant advances some of them. But here as before nothing can strengthen the final argument just put forward, that of the individual's moral responsibility.

### iv. *The Influence of Alcohol*

Vegetarianism, and the brutalising effects of meat eating, lead us naturally to the consideration of the influence of alcohol on the individual and on the people at large. Just as we confined ourselves in the previous section, for the sake of brevity, to a single and comparatively recent publication of Annie Besant's, so now, and for the same reason, we may take our quotations from only one comparatively early lecture. And here also, in view of the magnitude of the subject, we must confine ourselves to a single aspect of the problem. In Annie Besant's own words : " I am not going to deal with the drink-question in its bearings on

[1] Annie Besant, *Vegetarianism in the Light of Theosophy* (Adyar 1913), pp. 17–20.

the subject of poverty. I am not going to discuss drinking in relation to the misery it spreads throughout the country, or the crime of which it is the source. I am not going to-day to point you specially to the misery of the drunkard's home, or contrast in appearance, in health and in mental endowment the children of the drunkard and the children of the abstainer : all those are useful aspects of the subject ; are arguments that everyone of you may well have at your fingers' ends when you are trying to combat this great enemy of our race—strong drink—but the lines which I am going to follow may possibly suggest to some of you fresh argument, with which to supplement the others ; and even those of you who may disagree with the foundation on which they are based, may yet find in the arguments themselves useful reinforcement for your general line of thought." [1]

Annie Besant then proceeds to say that the point of view from which she proposes to discuss the problem is that of theosophy, and first considers the effects of alcohol on the body. "We look on the body, of course, from our standpoint, as an instrument of the spiritual Intelligence which we regard as the man himself ; that is, looking at ourselves, we regard the body as the coating, the garment, the instrument, used for work in the physical work, so that the efficacy of the work will very largely depend upon the integrity of the instrument. Just as no workman

[1] Annie Besant, *The Influence of Alcohol* (London [1892]), pp. 3–4.

could perform a good piece of work if he were using, say, a blunt chisel, a twisted screw-driver, or a hammer whose head fell off the moment he struck a blow with it ; so cannot the real man, the inner man, the true man, do effective work on the physical plane, if the instrument whereby that work is to be performed is injured, spoilt, blunted, or stunted by any habit which injures physical life." [1]

Then follows a summary of theosophical teaching on the subject of the formation of the body and a demonstration of the manner in which alcohol harms it : " Alcohol happens to be a substance which peculiarly takes up the magnetism of those who come into contact with it. I may speak of it in the chemical sense as a certain definite chemical compound made up of certain chemical atoms held together in a particular way. You may have a variety of forms depending on the number of the atoms that go to make them up, but, whatever the numbers, they always bear the same proportion to each other. The alcohol-radical is made up of two elements—carbon and hydrogen—perfectly harmless in themselves, perfectly respectable members of the chemical family. They only become disreputable in their combination into a particular form, and when you get a particular combination of them and add to them part of the molecule of water, you then get what you speak of as ' spirit,' which is of course largely diluted before ordinarily taken ; but the mis-

[1] Annie Besant, *The Influence of Alcohol* (London [1892]), p. 4.

chievous part of this diluted drink is the particular combination of chemical atoms and the proportion they bear to each other, known to the chemist as the alcohol-radical. Whether you get it in methylated spirit, in your beer, wine, etc., whether you get it in still more fiery forms like the potato spirit—which is largely used in the manufacture of the cheaper form of spirits, and is even more destructive and energetic than that which is ordinarily used—however you get it, it is always essentially marked by the same characteristics, and those characteristics cannot be separated from it. They are the direct result of this particular combination of the chemical elements. When taken into the body the alcohol carries with it the magnetism of the different persons who have been mixed up in its preparation. As a rule, persons who are concerned in the making of these drinks are not the most thoughtful, refined, or cultured of human beings. As a rule they show the influence of that in which they are continually working, and get a certain physical stamp upon them that enables you to recognise them as persons who are normally connected with this particular form of industry. I am not saying anything which is exaggerated—every one of you must know it, from your own observation. Any-one of you could pick out a brewer's man from a whole parcel of teetotalers." [1]

This passage contains the gist of Annie Besant's arguments from the theosophical point of view ;

[1] Annie Besant, *The Influence of Alcohol* (London [1892]), pp. 7–8.

after further considerations along the same and similar lines, the paper concludes : " You can understand then, how, with such a theory of life, we should be strongly against drinking habits everywhere, for it is as though in building a house you deliberately took bad material and poisoned substances to build into your walls, so that when you came to dwell in the house its very walls should be poison-giving instead of health-giving. That is the other side of the question—the reaction on the inner man of the dwelling he fashions for himself.

Whether you take my first line of argument—the body built of these atoms that we impregnate or stamp ; or whether you regard it as a dwelling-place of this true man—the inner self—you will see why the Theosophist is likely to be a teetotaler, and why he throws all his influence against the cursing of man by drink." [1]

The larger part of Annie Besant's writings on these four subjects has been cited in the footnotes.

[1] Annie Besant, *The Influence of Alcohol* (London) [1892]), p. 15.

# CHAPTER IV

## THE STATUS OF WOMEN

While in many respects this problem may be held to have to-day a merely historical interest, this is not yet altogether the case. There are still many directions in which women hold a status inferior to that of men. It is therefore still important, as well as retrospectively interesting, to keep well in mind the arguments in favour of absolute equality in law of men and women. One assumption we may perhaps be reasonably allowed to make, that no one any longer question the theoretical rights of women to such status, and that, at any rate, is a great step forward in thought.

The question of the status of women must be approached from several points, of which the political may well be taken first, as undoubtedly the most practically important. The reason for this seemingly paradoxical importance has been well stated by Annie Besant. Writing over forty years ago she pointed out that it is " perfectly true that the want of representation in Parliament is not, *in itself*, a grave injury. In itself, I say, it is of secondary importance ; its gravity consists in what it involves. You do not value money for its

own sake—those little yellow counters are not intrinsically beautiful, nor are they in themselves worth toil, and trouble, and danger ; but you value them for what they represent ; and thus we value a vote, as means to an end. In a free country, a vote means power. When a man is a voter, his wishes must be taken into consideration; he counts as one in an election—his opinion influences the return. When the working-classes wished to alter laws which pressed hardly on them, they agitated for Parliamentary reform. What folly ! What waste of time ! What throwing away of strength and energy ! how unpractical ! Why agitate for an extension of the franchise, when so many social burdens required to be lightened ? Why ? Because they knew that when they won the franchise they could trust to themselves to remedy these social anomalies—when they had votes, they could make these questions the test of the fitness or unfitness of a candidate for Parliament. Non-voters, they could only *ask* for reform ; voters, they could *command* it. And this is the answer of women to those who urge on them that they should turn their attention to practical matters, and leave off this agitation about the franchise. We shall do nothing so foolish. True, certain laws press hardly on us ; but we are not going now to agitate for the repeal of these laws one by one. We might agitate for a very long time before we gained attention. We prefer going to the root of the matter at once. We will win the right of

representation in Parliament, and when we have won that, *these laws will be altered*." [1]

At this time we may no doubt pass over the question whether women are entitled to such rights as are claimed by and for them, with the following brief quotation : " It is quite a new light to the general public that women have any rights at all ; duties ? ay, plenty of them, with sharp penalties for their non-fulfilment. Wrongs ? ay, plenty of them, too—wrongs which will not be borne much longer. Privileges ? yes, if we will take them as privileges, and own that we hold them at the will of our masters ; but *rights* ? The assertion was at first met with laughter that was only not indignant, because it was too contemptuous. . . . " [2]

To the argument that women are inherently inferior to men, Annie Besant made the following unanswerable reply, which, it should be noted, does not deny that women in some respect are " inferior " to men, just as men are " inferior " to women in other respects. But it is simply maintained, with incontestable logic, that, given legal equality, men and women would find their natural levels : " I would urge on those who believe in women's *natural* inferiority, why, in the name of common sense, are you so terribly afraid of putting your theory to the proof ? Open to women the learned professions ; unlock the gates which bar

[1] Annie Besant, *The Political Status of Women* (London [1885 ? ]), pp. 4–5.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

her out from your mental strifes ; give her no favour, no special advantages ; let her race you on even terms. She *must* fail, if nature be against her ; she *must* be beaten, if nature has incapacitated her for the struggle. Why do you fear to let her challenge you, if she is weighted not only with the transmitted effects of long centuries of inferiority, but is also bound with nature's iron chain ? Try. If you are so sure about nature's verdict, do not fear her arbitration; but if you shrink from our rivalry, we *must* believe that you feel our equality, and, to cover your own doubts of your superiority, you prattle about our feebleness." [1]

Such, in general, were the lines followed by Annie Besant in her work for women at that time ; and this was her ideal : " Injustice is never good ; it is never even safe. There is a higher life before us, a nobler ideal of marriage union, a fairer development of individual natures, a surer hope of wider happiness. Liberty for every human being, equality before the law for all in public and in private, fraternity of men and women in peaceful friendship, these are the promise of the dawning day. Co-workers in every noble labour, co-partners in every righteous project, co-soldiers in every just cause, men and women in the time to come shall labour, think, and struggle side by side. The man shall bring his greater strength and more sustained determination, the woman her

[1] Annie Besant, *The Political Status of Women* (London [1885 ? ]), p. 7.

quicker judgment and purer heart, till man shall grow tenderer, and woman stronger, man more pure, and woman more brave and free. Till at last, generations hence, the race shall develop into a strength and a beauty at present unimagined, and men and women shall walk this fair earth hand-in-hand, diverse, yet truly one, set each to each

'As perfect music unto noble words.'" [1]

Not always, however, was it possible for Annie Besant, or for any other worker in the cause of women at that time, to speak and write on that plane. When the time came for the examination and the denouncing of particular abuses and grievances, it was necessary to speak more energetically, to give shrewder blows. Thus, when she turned to the discussion of what may be called the sexual status of women, as illustrated by prostitution and marriage, we find Annie Besant making a bitter attack on the current views of the Churches, based on a literal interpretation of the Old Testament.[2] "This marriage question," Annie Besant protests, "is surely sufficiently important, morally and socially, to be discussed gravely, without the imputation of foul motive to those who would try to meet a real difficulty by sober and well-considered changes. But the

[1] Annie Besant, *The Political Status of Women* (London [1885 ?]), p. 14.

[2] Annie Besant, *God's Views on Marriage as revealed in the Old Testament* (London 1883); *Woman's Position according to the Bible* (London 1885).

intolerance of priests shrieks out foul names against all those who ignore their right to regulate the conditions of social life." [1] But such calumnies, of which no mean share fell to her, had not the slightest effect on Annie Besant, who pursued her advocacy of marriage reform for many years,[2] as well as speaking and writing against the evils of prostitution, which she aptly described as " female slavery." [3]

When Annie Besant went to India she found fresh fields for her work for the liberation of women from their long subjection. In India the position was particularly difficult owing to the operation of religious and almost immemorial prejudices. But in the course of time these were overcome, Annie Besant and her fellow-workers having wisely concentrated on the spread, or rather the institution, of education among the Indian girls. " One of the first things done by Countess Wachtmeister and myself," writes Annie Besant, " when we came to India in 1893, was to concern ourselves with the question of the education of girls. But many thoughtful Indians begged us to wait until we had secured the confidence of the Hindu community, so that no suspicion could arise with regard to our objects. . . .

Ten years have passed since then, and we may

[1] Annie Besant, *God's Views on Marriage* (London 1883), p. 15.

[2] *E.g.*, Annie Besant, *Marriage: as it was, as it is, and as it should be* (New York [1879].

[3] *E.g.*, Annie Besant, *The Legalisation of Female Slavery in England* (London 1885).

truly say that the confidence of the Hindu public in the purity of our aims and the straightforwardness of our actions has been won. The appeals to me to take up the education of girls have been many and urgent, and unqualified approval of the scheme I have submitted in writing and speech has been expressed. It seems time, therefore, to give this scheme a wider publicity, and, if it be acceptable, as it seems to be, to a large number of Hindus, then to let it serve as the basis of a national movement for the education of girls. It is already being followed in a few small girls' schools, carried on by Lodges of the Theosophical Society, and may henceforth take a fuller shape." [1] Annie Besant then proceeds to outline this scheme, under the heads of religious and moral education, literary education, scientific education, artistic education and physical education, and concludes : " Of this we may be sure, that Indian greatness will not return until Indian womanhood obtains a larger, a freer, and a fuller life, for largely in the hands of Indian women must lie the redemption of India. The wife inspires or retards the husband ; the mother makes or mars the child. The power of woman to uplift or debase man is practically unlimited, and man and woman must walk forward hand-in-hand to the raising of India, else will she never be raised at all. The battle for

[1] Annie Besant, *The Education of Indian Girls* (Benares and London, 1904), pp. 1–2. See also *id.*, " Girls' Education," " Widow-Remarriage," " Indian Women," *The Birth of New India* (Adyar 1917), pp. 157–162, 299–302, 303–310.

the religious and moral education of boys is won, although the victory has still to be made effective all over India. The battle for the education of girls is just beginning, and may Ishvara bless those who are the vanguard, and all beneficent Powers enlighten their minds and make strong their hearts." [1]

A decade later still, just before the Great War, Annie Besant again spoke on the status of women, and she had to lament that still the long-awaited reforms had not come. "Forty years ago, in the Co-operative Hall, Castle Street, Oxford Street, I gave my first public lecture on woman suffrage. Forty years have passed, and still it is a burning question. For forty years and more women have been claiming justice; for forty years and more that justice has been denied." [2] However, Annie Besant has lived to see the vote given to women, though still not on an equality with men,[3] and she certainly holds a high place among those women of whom she spoke in the conclusion of the same lecture, in saying: "And in the days to come people, looking back upon this struggle, shall marvel that in free England such a struggle could ever have been waged. In that day, when men and women are together in the rights of citizens, in the freedom of the country, in all patriotic work, oh! then to those who have suffered shall

[1] Annie Besant, *The Education of Indian Girls* (Benares and London, 1904), p. 10.

[2] Annie Besant, *Women and Politics* (London 1914), p. 3.

[3] Since this chapter was written the Prime Minister has pledged himself to the removal of this last anomaly.

come the glory of sacrifice which has made that triumph possible ; for they shall be acclaimed by history as warriors who made the woman's cause triumphant ; and the wrongs that have been done, and I grant the wrongs—for I have always spoken against the policy of violence, even though I realise the motive of those who have been driven into it, and I honour their heroism in the struggle—those wrongs, that violence, will be forgotten in the splendour of the work they have done, and their names shall shine for ever in history as those who made women free." [1]

A number of Annie Besant's separate publications on this subject are cited in the footnotes.

[1] Annie Besant, *Women and Politics* (London 1914), p. 31.

# CHAPTER V

## SOCIALISM

At the beginning of 1884 Annie Besant addressed the following message to the readers of *The National Reformer*, of which she was then co-editor with Charles Bradlaugh : " What tests 1884 may have for our courage, what strains on our endurance, what trials of our loyalty, none can tell. But this we know—that every test of courage successfully met, every strain of endurance steadily borne, every trial of loyalty nobly surmounted, leaves courage braver, endurance stronger, loyalty truer, than each was before. And therefore, for our own and for the world's sake, I will not wish you, friends, an 1884 in which there shall be no toil and no battling ; but I will wish you, each and all, the hero's heart and the hero's patience, in the struggle for the world's raising, that will endure through the coming year."

These words applied almost prophetically to Annie Besant's own experiences in this year, in which she was for the first time brought face to face with the choice between the acceptance of Socialism on the one hand and the placid continuance in the old ways, on the other. In April

took place a debate between her close colleague Bradlaugh and Hyndman, and here, for the first time, she failed to see eye to eye with the former. She came into contact with Bernard Shaw, the Webbs, the Blands, and others, principally through the intermediary of her paper *Our Corner*, in which, in 1885, we find her publishing a series of articles making plain her adhesion to Socialism and her reasons for doing so.

In *The Redistribution of Political Power* (1885) is traced the results of the Reform Bills of 1832, 1867 and 1884, with an indication of the lines which should be followed by future progress. The following passage from this pamphlet shows the direction in which Annie Besant's mind was working at this period : " There can be no doubt in the minds of reasonable people that a ten hours' day is too long. . . . The new Parliament should pass an Eight Hours Bill, making the legal day a day of eight hours only, and giving one half-holiday in the week, so that the weekly hours of labor shall not exceed forty-four. In time to come I trust that the hours of labor will be yet further shortened, but the passage of an Eight Hours Bill would mark a good step forward. Looking at the question from a rational point of view, it is surely clear that a human being should not be required to give more than eight hours out of the twenty-four—one-third of his time—for absolute bread-winning. Another seven or eight hours must be given to sleep, leaving eight for

meals, exercise, recreation, and study. The last eight are short enough for their varied uses, and I look forward to a time when the first section shall be shortened and the third lengthened ; but if every worker had even eight hours of freedom in the day, his life would be a far more human and far more beautiful thing than it is at the present time." [1]

In a pamphlet entitled *Why I am a Socialist* (1886), which had a very wide circulation, Annie Besant arranges her reasons under three heads : " I am a Socialist because I am a believer in Evolution," " I am a Socialist because of the failure of our present civilisation," and " I am a Socialist because the poverty of the workers is, and must continue to be, an integral part of the present method of wealth-production and wealth-distribution." [2] The first of these arguments is developed in *The Evolution of Society* (1886), in which there is shown to be a progressively evolutionary scheme in the development of Society to industrialism and from industrialism to socialism. " The conflict between social and anti-social tendencies has existed as long as Society itself," writes Annie Besant in the same pamphlet. " It is the contest between the integrating and disintegrating forces, between the brute survival and the human evolution. The individual struggle for existence which had gone on through

[1] Annie Besant, *The Redistribution of Political Power* (London 1885), pp. 24–25.

[2] Annie Besant, *Why I am a Socialist* (London 1886), pp. 2, 4, 6.

countless centuries over the whole world had become to some extent modified among the social animals, and savage man, as the highest of these, had also modified it within the limits of each community. As Society progressed slowly in civilisation, the contest went on between the surviving brutal, or savage, desire for personal accumulation and personal aggrandisement without regard for others, and the social desire for general prosperity and happiness with the readiness to subordinate the individual to the general good." [1]

In opposition to this, or, in Annie Besant's own words, " Over against those who laud the present state of Society with its unjustly rich and unjustly poor, with its palaces and its slums, its millionaires and its paupers, be it ours to proclaim that there is a higher ideal in life than that of being first in the scramble for gold. Be it ours to declare steadfastly that health, comfort, leisure, culture, plenty for every individual, are far more desirable than breathless struggle for existence, furious trampling down of the weak by the strong, huge fortunes accumulated out of the toil of others, to be handed down to those who have done nothing to earn them. Be it ours to maintain that the greatness of a nation depends not on the number of its great proprietors, on the wealth of its great capitalists, on the splendor of its great nobles ; but on the absence of poverty among its people, on the education of its masses, on the universality

[1] Annie Besant, *The Evolution of Society* (London 1886), p. 15.

of enjoyment in life." [1] And this was the ideal which Annie Besant set up for the socialist to follow : " Enough for each of work, of leisure, of joy ; too little for none ; such is the Social Ideal. Better to strive for it worthily, and fail, than to die without striving for it at all." [2]

*Modern Socialism* (1886) analyses the capitalistic system more closely and offers specific remedies. The evils " can be radically cured only in one way ; it is by the substitution of co-operation for competition, of organisation for anarchy in industry." [3] The measures advocated follow the customary lines of socialistic reform, that is, nationalisation, more and better education, greater leisure, and so on. " Education, training, culture, these make class distinctions, and nothing can efface them save common education and equally refined life-surroundings. Such education and life-surroundings cannot be shared so long as some enjoy wealth they do not earn, and others are deprived of the wealth they do earn. Land and capital must be made common property, and then no man will be in a position to enslave his brother by placing before him the alternative of starvation or servitude. And because no system save that of Socialism claims that there shall be no monopoly of that on which the whole nation must depend, of the soil on which it is born and must subsist, of the capital accumulated

[1] Annie Besant, *The Evolution of Society* (London 1886), pp. 14–15.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[3] Annie Besant, *Modern Socialism* (London 1886), p. 27.

by the labor of its innumerable children, living and dead ; because no system save that of Socialism claims for the whole community control of its land and capital ; because no system save that of Socialism declares that wealth created by associated workers should be shared among those workers, and that no idlers should have a lien upon it ; because no system save that of Socialism makes industry really free and the worker really independent, by substituting co-operation among workers for employed and employing classes ; because of all this I am a Socialist. My Socialism is based on the recognition of economic facts, on the study of the results which flow inevitably from the present economic system. The pauper and the millionaire are alike its legitimate children ; the evil tree brings forth its evil fruits." [1]

Annie Besant's socialist experiences at this time were not confined to pen and paper. In 1887 a meeting was arranged to be held in Trafalgar Square, which was unexpectedly closed at the last minute. " The procession I was in started from Clerkenwell Green, and walked with its banner in front, and the chosen speakers, including myself, immediately behind the flag. As we were moving slowly and quietly along one of the narrow streets debouching on Trafalgar Square, wondering whether we should be challenged, there was a sudden charge, and without a word the police were upon us with uplifted truncheons ; the banner was struck down, and men and women

[1] Annie Besant, *Why I am a Socialist* (London 1886), p. 8.

were falling under a hail of blows. There was no attempt at resistance, the people were too much astounded at the unprepared attack. They scattered, leaving some of their number on the ground too much injured to move, and then made their way in twos or threes to the Square. It was garrisoned by police, drawn up in serried rows, that could only have been broken by a deliberate charge. Our orders were to attempt no violence, and we attempted none. Mr Cunninghame Graham and Mr John Burns, arm-in-arm, tried to pass through the police, and were savagely cut about the head and arrested. Then ensued a scene to be remembered; the horse police charged in squadrons at a hand-gallop, rolling men and women over like ninepins, while the foot police struck recklessly with their truncheons, cutting a road through the crowd that closed immediately behind them. I got on a waggonette and tried to persuade the driver to pull his trap across one of the roads, and to get others in line, so as to break the charges of the mounted police; but he was afraid, and drove away to the Embankment, so I jumped out and went back to the Square. . . . All other processions were treated as ours had been, and the injuries inflicted were terrible. Peaceable, law-abiding workmen, who had never dreamed of rioting, were left with broken legs, broken arms, wounds of every description. One man, Linnell, died almost immediately, others from the effect of their injuries." [1]

[1] *Annie Besant: an Autobiography* (London 1893), pp. 324–326.

After this came Annie Besant's triumphant agitation on behalf of the miserable and oppressed match-girls. Hardly had she emerged from this task than there " came a cry for help from South London, from tin-box makers, illegally fined, and in many cases grievously mutilated by the non-fencing of machinery ; then aid to shop assistants, also illegally fined ; legal defences by the score still continued ; a vigorous agitation for a free meal for children, and for fair wages to be paid by all public bodies ; work for the dockers and exposure of their wrongs ; a visit to the Cradley Heath chain-makers, speeches for them, writing for them ; a contest for the School Board for the Tower Hamlets division, and triumphant return at the head of the poll. Such were some of the ways in which the autumn days [of 1888] were spent. . . . " [1]

While Annie Besant has remained a convinced Socialist since those stirring eighties, she has always refused to adopt the extreme views of what is erroneously called the left wing of the Labour Party. The methods by which she advocates the coming of the socialist state are those of constitutional development and, characteristically, of self-sacrifice : " By the self-sacrifice of those who have, and not by the revolution and the uprising of those who have not.

Revolution can destroy ; it cannot build. The ignorant can rise up ; they cannot construct. Not by the starving and the miserable can a social

[1] *Annie Besant: an Autobiography* (London 1893), p. 338.

order be established wherein all shall live in peace and happiness, wherein all shall share leisure and the beauty and grace of life. And if I would plead for that self-sacrifice to-day, it is because to me there are certain priceless things that exist in this nation that a revolution would destroy and bring to naught : the accumulated results and the habits of centuries, the dignity, the grace, the sense of beauty that makes life human, and not a mere struggle between contending savages. Those things, which now belong only to a class, should be spread over the whole of the nation. Not to pull down those who are higher, but to lift up those who are lower, that should be our aim. It is so easy to destroy, so difficult to make again." [1] Or, as Annie Besant has stated in different terms elsewhere, " To deal with these economic questions we want the best brains and the best hearts, the widest knowledge and the deepest sympathy. Those, and those only, can solve the terrible economic problems of the time. You cannot solve them by any rough-and-ready means, nor by any quick and sudden means. You must save them by wisdom and by love, and by realising the nation's interest is a common interest, not of class against class, but of union of all for the common good of the community." [2]

Another respect in which Annie Besant's socialism is characteristic of her general outlook

[1] Annie Besant, *The Immediate Future* (London 1911), pp. 92–93.
[2] Annie Besant, *The Changing World* (London 1909), pp. 100–101.

on life, is in her never-failing awareness that socialism is only a means to an end, not a hard and fast goal in itself. She has always been free from the taint of doctrinairism, and in her application of her theories she has been ready to adapt them to the needs of the moment. This can be well illustrated in the events of 1914 in connection with the erection of the proposed new headquarters of The Theosophical Society in England.[1] The contractors, Messrs Cubitt, in common with other members of the trade, had locked out their workmen. At this time Annie Besant arrived in England and found all building operations suspended, with all the loss of time and money this involved. She made a proposal to the London Building Trades Federation that they should supply her direct with Trade Union men, and proceed with the work. They agreed to this, and an agreement to this effect was signed. Now, however, the contractors demanded the return of their scaffolding, a very serious matter. This was immediately agreed to, and new scaffolding was purchased so promptly that the building ring's " corner " in building materials was anticipated. A further attempt to prevent the supply of the materials bought was defeated by a margin of only two hours. The old scaffolding came down in three days instead of the usual fortnight, and the new went up with equal speed. On her departure from London Annie Besant was pre-

[1] This building, after having been taken over by the Government during the war, is now the house of the British Medical Association.

sented with the following address at a farewell meeting :

" Madam,

It is my pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the Staff now working on the Theosophical Building on your visit to us to-day, and to ask you to accept this small token from us as a mark of the appreciation that we feel towards you in the very splendid work you have started in the Building Trade. Some of us present to-day remember the splendidly unselfish work you have done in the past, and your untiring energy in the uplifting of the working classes, and we know and feel that in your work of the present time you have the best interests of all classes at heart.

We are all members of Brotherhoods and Trade Unions, and we have shown what determination and holding together will do in the struggle that is now going on and which is now in the 23rd week, a struggle that has cost us, our wives and children many hardships and privations, but we know that our cause is just, and know that Brotherhood and Co-operation will finally overcome all difficulties. We thank you for coming amongst us as you have done to-day, and especially for breaking the bonds of convention as you have done by the employment of direct labor, and have thus made it possible for us to earn our living, and you may rest assured that the work you have given to us—against great opposition—will be well done, and so we wish you God-speed and a safe ending to the journey you start on to-night, and

we hope to again welcome you on your return to England. May success attend you in whatever you may put your hand to." [1]

In conclusion I cannot do better than quote an important passage in which is most lucidly expressed Annie Besant's faith and hopes in regard to Socialism. Writing in 1908 in an English periodical, she said : " Those who study carefully the tendencies of the times, must recognise the increasing power of the Socialist movement in this land, as well as in lands where it is a more militant force than it is here ; and such thinkers will do well to consider along what lines it will work in days to come, and what will be the outlines of the Socialism which it is proposed to establish.

Now in dealing with that question, there is one idea that will dominate all that I say. Just as every Socialist declares that politics alone are utterly insufficient to make a happy and prosperous nation, just as he truly says that economics must be rightly understood and rightly applied, and that without that an understanding and application of political reform must fail and crumble, so I believe that economics alone are not enough to make a nation prosperous and free. Important as economics may be and are, behind economics lie men and women, and unless those men and women are trained into a noble humanity, economic schemes will fail as hopelessly as any political

[1] Annie Besant, *The Guild System as a substitute for Trade Unionism* (Madras [1921]), Appendix E, p. viii,

schemes can possibly do. For while it is true that the politician is building a house without a foundation, while it is true that Socialists are trying to make that foundation, still the foundation must be of good materials, or a rotten foundation will be as unfortunate to the house as no foundation at all. And there is a danger—a danger the more pressing the more successful the Socialist propaganda proves—that as the State takes over one thing after another, and tries to guide the great industries of the country for the common good, unless there are at the head of those industries, and unless there are as workers in those industries, trustworthy, upright, unselfishness, Socialism will inevitably fail. And if there is one thing more clear than another in looking [at] the efforts of the proletariat through the country, it is that they do not trust each other, either their leaders or their comrades. They have not that trust which alone can make success in any enterprise ; and they need, not only trust in upright leaders, but they need the discipline, the subordination based on self-control, without which no undertaking can, in the long run, be successful. For if it is true, as it unfortunately is,[1] that individualistic enterprises of production have been far more successful than co-operative production has proved itself to be, experimental and local as the whole thing has been, it is also true that when there is one vast co-operative body called the

[1] [The reader is asked to remember that this was first published in 1908.]

State, it will want the virtues that make good citizens, otherwise the Socialist State will crumble into pieces, as other States have done. And it is this point which seems to me to be lacking in Socialistic propaganda. It is this point which, more than anything else, led me outside the paths of Socialist propaganda into trying to form the material which the Socialist needs for the building of the State. For without that material, all efforts must fail, and the material cannot be made by outer organisation alone. There is the tendency of advancing thought, though growing less and less, I think, with every year, to regard the environment as everything, and the man as nothing, to think that the good environment will make the good man. It is forgotten that environment and living organism react the one upon the other ; and though it is true that we need a better environment, though the environment of many men and women to-day is so unutterably vile that it is almost impossible that healthy plants can grow therein, still the fact that the man is a living creature, who more than any other adapts his environment to himself, is too much forgotten in the ordinary teaching of Socialism. And yet it is an essential part of a real Socialist propaganda. Now, I believe that the next great stage of civilisation will be Socialistic ; that in the centuries that lie before us there will be realised many of the economic conditions, probably all, that the Socialists of the day demand ; but I see, at the same time, that unless the leaders of the

Socialist party are educated far beyond the masses that they lead, and unless those masses understand that wisdom should give authority, all schemes must be wrecked ; unless it be possible to have a Socialism where the wisest shall guide, and plan, and direct, I do not see that the mere change of economic conditions will make things so enormously better than they are to-day. For although it is true that by better economics we may change the outer conditions, man wants something more than food to eat and raiment to put on ; man demands more and more, as he unfolds his inner powers, not only what the body demands imperatively, but that which the mind, and conscience, and Spirit, no less imperatively demand ; and I fear lest this movement should be wrecked on the lack of recognition of the real nature of man, that he will be treated as a body only and not as a spiritual intelligence, and that against this rock all schemes will break ; for we cannot ignore the real nature of man." [1]

Some of Annie Besant's writings, in addition to those already mentioned, on Socialism and kindred matters, are *History of the Great French Revolution* (London 1876–1883), *Free Trade versus "Fair" Trade* (London 1881), *Civil and Religious Liberty* (London 1883), *Radicalism and Socialism* (London 1887), *The Socialist Movement* (London 1887), "Industry under Socialism," in *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (London 1889), *The*

[1] Annie Besant, *The Future Socialism* (Adyar 1912), pp. 1–4.

*Place of Politics in the Life of a Nation* (Benares 1895), *Social Problems* (Adyar 1912), *Social Service* (Adyar 1916), *Lectures on Political Science* (Adyar 1919). A number of early writings have been collected in *Social and Political Essays* and *Essays on Socialism*. Annie Besant also took part in public debates with G. W. Foote on *Is Socialism Sound?* (London 1887), and with Frederick Millar on *Socialism v. Individualism* (London 1890).

# CHAPTER VI

## INDIA

Annie Besant's interest in India was not created by her adoption of Theosophy. She joined The Theosophical Society in 1889, but a full ten years before that we find her entering a passionate defence of India and Afghanistan against the policy of Disraeli in England and Lytton in India. For instance, in 1879 she published through the Freethought Publishing Company a pamphlet energetically entitled *The Story of Afghanistan: or, Why the Tory Government gags the Indian Press. A Plea for the Weak against the Strong.*

Anticipating protest against her criticism of England's conduct in India, Annie Besant writes in this pamphlet (pp. 3–4): "It is said to be unpatriotic to blame one's country. But not so have I read the history of England's noblest patriots. Love of England does not mean approval and endorsement of the policy of some Oriental adventurer whom chance and personal ability and unscrupulousness have raised to power. Love of England means reverence for her past, work for her future; it means sympathy with all that is noble and great in her history, and endeavor

to render her yet more noble, yet more great : it means triumph in her victories over oppression, delight in her growing freedom, glory in her encouragement of all nations struggling towards liberty ; it means pride in her pure name, in her fair faith, in her unsoiled honor, in her loyal word ; it means condemnation of her bullying, boasting, cruel imperialism . . . and regretful remorseful turning back to the old paths of duty, of honor, and of faith.

Therefore this plea of mine for the weak against the strong is not an unpatriotic attack on our own beloved land, but rather the loving effort of a child to save a mother whose honor and whose life are threatened by unscrupulous betrayers."

This is a noble doctrine, nobly stated, and nobly maintained during more than half a century of such pleas for " the weak against the strong."

Before we proceed, it is interesting to note that even in this early pamphlet Annie Besant was already teaching the great lesson that a nation's sins, as much as an individual's, recoil on to its own head. National immorality must result in national decay, and in the last sentence of *The Story of Afghanistan* is sounded the warning note : " Will England be loyal to her love of truth and her hatred of oppression, or has she begun to tread the path of disregard of all duty, of contempt for all morality, the path that inevitably leads to national decay ? "

After joining The Theosophical Society Annie Besant not only took up the cause of India with

renewed vigour, but also, in 1893, made her home in that country, as it has remained ever since. The importance of the work she has done there, and its general trend, can be gathered from the following eloquent tribute, which is the more eloquent from being unintended as a tribute. Sir Valentine Chirol in his *Times* articles on what he called Indian unrest, wrote that " The advent of the theosophists, heralded by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, gave a fresh impetus to the revival, and certainly no Hindu has done so much to organize and consolidate the movement as Mrs Annie Besant, who, in her Central Hindu College at Benares and her Theosophical Institution at Adyar, near Madras, has openly proclaimed her faith in the superiority of the whole Hindu system to the vaunted civilization of the West. Is it surprising that Hindus should turn their backs upon our civilization, when a European of highly-trained intellectual power and with an extraordinary gift of eloquence comes and tells them that it is they who possess and have from all times possessed, the key to supreme wisdom ; that their gods, their philosophy, their morality are on a higher plane of thought than the West has ever reached ? " [1]

As may be gathered from this passage, Annie Besant's two chief lines of approach to the reawakening of India and the achievement of Home Rule within the Empire, were the religious and the educational, though these are so closely

[1] (Sir) Valentine Chirol, *Indian Unrest* (London 1910), pp. 28–29.

inter-connected as not to be capable of being separated. When Annie Besant first went to India she found that " Colonel Olcott had revived Buddhism and greatly uplifted Zoroastrianism ; my first task, as he gladly acknowledged, was to perform the same service to Hinduism, and to this I set myself, showing the insufficiency of materialism as an answer to the problems of life, and the immense superiority of Hinduism as a philosophy encasing an all-embracing religion and a science of yoga, which was an open road to the worlds invisible, to the ancient Rishis of India and the East, to the Saints of Christendom, to the Wisdom which included all religions, excluded none.

This note had been struck by Colonel Olcott ever since he had landed in India. In his very first lecture in Bombay, on March 23, 1879, on 'The Theosophical Society and its Aims,' he spoke of the 'majesty and sufficiency of Eastern Scriptures,' and made an 'appeal to the sentiment of patriotic loyalty to the memory of their forefathers to stand by their old religions.' We found patriotism was aroused by pointing to the splendour of Indian religions and poetic literatures, and that 'religion must inspire nationality.' It was significant that after the Theosophical Convention at Adyar, in 1884, a number of the delegates and members went over to Madras and formed the organizing Committee of the National Congress-to-be, which met in Bombay in 1885, and became the Voice of India ; the National self-respect, aroused by revived pride in Hinduism,

leading to the National Ideal of Self-Government. . . .

It soon became clear that in addition to reclaiming adults to their ancestral faiths, it was absolutely necessary to start a system of National Education, which would include religion. Already Colonel Olcott had changed the face of Ceylon by making Education the handmaid of Buddhism, and covering the Island with numbers of village schools in which the children learned their ancestral faith. Zoroastrianism had its own schools, for the Parsis were a wealthy though a small community ; no Parsi grew up outside of his religion. The Muhammadans had established a fine School and College at Aligarh, and had many schools scattered about the country. Hindus awoke to the fact that in losing their ancestral Faith they were also losing their Nationality, no longer recalling in their daily prayers their seven sacred cities from Kedarnāth in the Himālayas to Rāmeshvaram on India's southernmost border, nor visiting them and her sacred watering-places on pilgrimages, making all India one Holy Land to every Hindu. As a result of the religious awakening, an enthusiastic group of Hindus in Benares opened the two upper classes of a High School and the two lower classes of a College, subscribing the necessary funds and forming a Managing Committee, in 1898. This became famous as the Central Hindu School and College, and in 1916 it became the nucleus of, and presented its lands, buildings and funds to, the

present Hindu University. The Governor of the United Provinces, Sir Anthony Macdonell, denounced it as 'seditious,' but we went quietly on, and so justified ourselves by our work that the Prince and Princess of Wales—now the King-Emperor and Queen-Empress of India—visited the College when in India, and their son, the present Prince of Wales, accepted the first Doctorate of the Hindu University, its heir and successor." [1]

This account of the jointly religious and educational revival of India is characteristically incomplete in an important respect, namely, that the whole of this work was done under the inspiration, the direct guidance and often the sole responsibility, of Annie Besant herself. This was recognised by the granting to her of the Hindu University's second honorary degree, following, as stated above, the Prince of Wales.

In India, as elsewhere, the most striking aspect of Annie Besant's work is the fact that to a sweeping and far-seeing conception of the task in hand she joins a close and meticulous grasp of detail. Few imaginations could have conceived the plan for no less a task than the physical, intellectual and spiritual revival of India, a country, nay, a continent, enormous in size, enormous in population, enormously diverse and complex. Fewer could have had the knowledge and understanding to appreciate what paths would have to be trodden to reach the desired goal. But who else than

[1] Annie Besant, *India : Bond or Free ?* (London 1926), pp. 27–29.

Annie Besant could have added to these things the patience and devotion, which, not satisfied with the establishment of the College, wrote some of its most important text-books, organised its boys into debating-clubs, into sports-organisations, bade them join physical development to intellectual training, lectured to them, and, in short, treated them in such a way that in India to-day there are thousands of men who address Annie Besant as " Mother."

Although Annie Besant has made it her life-work to revivify in India a pure and orthodox Hinduism, she has not been blind to the anomalies created by that religion in the modern world. Consequently she has advocated, and succeeded in The Theosophical Society, at least, in bringing about, a relaxation of the strict rules of caste ; she has fought for the education of the women and the enlargement of their liberty ; she has taken a firm stand against child-marriage, not only by argument and by advocacy, but by closing the upper classes of the Central Hindu School to married boys and by doubling the fees for married first and second year students in the College ; and she has adopted a similar attitude in kindred problems.

All this, however, marks only the beginning of Annie Besant's labours for India. These various activities, as has already been hinted, were but the prelude to a still greater task, the gaining for India of Self-Government. Shortly before the war Annie Besant initiated a sustained agitation

for Home Rule. She employed every constitutional instrument that lay to her hand, and the training she had received in her early days in England enabled her to speak with full force and knowledge for the inexperienced Indians against the subtle methods of the Government. "The definite campaign for Home Rule," writes Annie Besant, "began in the spring of 1914, on January 2, when my fellow-workers and myself started a weekly Review, *The Commonweal*. . . . We stood for Religious Liberty, regarding all religions as ways to God; for National Education, 'with an open path from primary schools to the Universities'; for Social Reform, including foreign travel, uplift of the submerged classes, abolition of child-marriage, seclusion of women, color bar and the caste system." [1]

Later in the same year Annie Besant bought a Madras daily paper, and renamed it *New India*. "Round this and the weekly *Commonweal* was destined to rage the battle for Home Rule against the use of the tyrannical Press Law (abolished by Reformed Councils in 1921 with a mass of other cruel legislation, including the Rowlatt Act), and they bore aloft the banner of Home Rule through the years of the Great Agitation which ended in 1917, when Britain declared her goal to be the establishment of Self-Government in India." [2]

During this agitation Annie Besant not only edited these two newspapers (in addition, of

[1] Annie Besant, *India: Bond or Free?* (London 1926), p. 162.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 164.

course, to her regular Theosophical editing and other literary work), and organised the Home Rule League and the Congress League, not only wrote numerous pamphlets dealing with the most detailed aspects of the Indian problems, in such series as the New India Political Pamphlets, the National Conference Series and the National Home Rule League Series, but also published many books. These range from *India and the Empire* (1914), *The Birth of New India* (1917), *Congress Speeches* (1917) and *For India's Uplift* (1917), to *Wake Up, India: a Plea for Social Reform* (1913), the monumental *How India Wrought for Freedom: the Story of the National Congress told from Official Records* (1915) and *India: a Nation.*

This last book was first published in the well-known series called The People's Books; on being republished in India the English Government caused it to be withdrawn from circulation in 1916. In the following year Annie Besant and two of her fellow-workers on *New India* were interned without cause shown. "When we, the interned, foregathered at Ootacamund (where I had, as President of the Theosophical Society, a little house), a whirlwind broke out, raged up and down the country, stormed over to Britain, Russia, France, America, at several hundred miles an hour. Questions were asked in the House of Commons and in the Viceroy's Legislative Council. Members of Parliament, like the babes in the wood, were snowed under with leaves—of paper.

'Who would have thought,' said a very high official pensively, 'that there would have been such a fuss over an old woman?' Crowds of people and many popular leaders joined the Home Rule League. Meetings were held; resolutions flew about; C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Jamnadas Dwarkadas, Congressmen everywhere, fanned the storm and rode it. They preserved perfect order; never a window was broken; never a riot occurred; never a policeman was assaulted; never man, woman or child went to gaol. For three months the vehement agitation continued unbrokenly, without ever breaking a law, and the students who wanted to strike were kept in their schools and colleges and then—came the Declaration of August 20, 1917, that the goal of Great Britain in India was Responsible Government, and an announcement that the Secretary of State for India was coming thither to learn the wishes of the people. To 'obtain a calm atmosphere' the three internees were liberated." [1]

This great constitutional triumph was crowned by the election of Annie Besant as President for 1917 of the National Congress of India, a personal triumph as well as a political one. But Annie Besant has never been content to rest on her laurels; she continued the work, though there was no longer need for such intense agitation as before, and what may be reasonably regarded as the penultimate climax of her work was reached in 1925. In that year the Labour

[1] Annie Besant, *India: Bond or Free?* (London 1926), pp. 175–176.

Party in England adopted as its official policy in regard to India *The Commonwealth of India Bill*, which had been worked out during the three previous years, and finally adopted by the National Convention, of which Annie Besant was Secretary. The purpose of this Bill is to place India on an equal footing with the Self-Governing Dominions, sharing their responsibilities and their privileges. In her last message *To my Brothers and Sisters in India* (1917) before being interned, Annie Besant thus summed up her creed : " I am old, but I believe that I shall see India win Home Rule before I die. If I have helped ever so little to the realisation of that glorious hope, I am more than satisfied."

In addition to those mentioned above some of Annie Besant's more important works on India are *Letters to a Young Indian Prince* (Adyar 1921), in which are given detailed recommendations for the re-organisation of a small state along modern lines ; *The Future of Indian Politics* (Adyar and Benares, 1922), which is a contribution to the understanding of present-day problems ; *Indian Ideals in Education, Philosophy and Religion, and Art* (Calcutta 1925), being the first series of Kamala Lectures before the University of Calcutta ; and *India : Bond or Free ?* (London and New York, 1926), a systematic survey of the past, present and future of India. To these must be added religious works on India, which are noted in the chapter on Theosophy.

# CHAPTER VII

## RACE AND NATIONALITY

It would be idle to pretend that these subjects can be adequately discussed in a few pages. In the first place, the problem of race and the problem of nationality are quite distinct, theoretically, at any rate. If in practice they cannot be separated, what are we to say of such similarly related topics as economics, ethnology, biology, and the like? Yet all these factors must be taken into consideration if our conclusions are not to be superficial and, possibly, mistaken. Such a thorough survey cannot, however, be attempted here, not because the materials for it are not to be found in Annie Besant's writings, but because, on the contrary, her views on these subjects are so bound up with theosophy in general, that they are implicit in all her writings, though they have found explicit expression in but few. All that is attempted here is, therefore, merely to give a few hints taken from one of Annie Besant's most recent publications.

Lecturing on this subject in London in the autumn of 1925 as one of the *World Problems of To-day*, Annie Besant pointed out that of the 53,000,000 square miles of habitable land

on the globe, 47,000,000 belong to the white people ; while of the remaining 6,000,000 square miles 4,000,000 form the area of China and Japan, leaving only 2,000,000 for the whole of the remaining coloured peoples of the earth. Then as to population, in the British Empire there are 460,000,000 human beings, of whom 395,000,000, or about eight in every nine, are coloured, though these are, of course, dominated by the small minority of the white men.

Annie Besant points out the reasons why this state of affairs was possible : " Taking those figures for the moment and looking back over a very considerable time, we shall find amongst the coloured races that are dominated by the white races, or interfered with by the white races, a kind of quiet acquiescence, a kind of recognition of white superiority, a kind of desire to share in that apparent superiority." [1] It is thus obvious that as soon as the coloured races, at any rate, the cultured coloured races of the East, lost this feeling of inferiority to the white races, race conflicts would arise. This is what happened. The coloured races looked on or took part in the Great War, many of them visited the West for the first time. They contemplated Western civilization at its worst, and began to ask themselves in what the white man's boasted superiority lay. They looked at the past achievements of their own races and cultures, and the idea arose more strongly in them than ever before, that if they

[1] Annie Besant, *World Problems of To-day* (London 1925), p. 31.

could throw off the yoke of the white man, those achievements of the past could be repeated.

And then, further, " there were struck out in the war certain words which caught the imagination of the East ; not meant, I think, really to travel so far as they did, but they rang all through the Eastern nations. There was that phrase of President Wilson's, that the war was fought ' to make the world fit and safe for free men to live in.' Mr Lloyd George, then Prime Minister of England, spoke of the application of the great ideals of Liberty, of Self-determination, ' to tropical countries.' And the tropical countries caught up the phrase ; it was heard in Persia, it was heard in Mesopotamia, it was heard in India, it was heard in Japan ; and, translated into their own tongues, it became the watchword of Freedom for Asia. And then, another Prime Minister preceding Mr Lloyd George, the Earl of Oxford and Asquith (Mr Asquith as he then was), descanted in words that again rang through the East about the ' intolerableness of a foreign yoke.' He only meant it to apply to England, possibly to be conquered by Germany ; but India applied it to India's Government by white people. And so they thought they were fighting for real ideals, for Liberty. And, when the Peace, or the armistice, was signed, and the remnant of her soldiers went home once more and told of the ways of the West in their villages—told the widows and the orphans in the villages that their fathers had died for Liberty, for Indians to be

free as their white masters were free—then there spread throughout the whole of India a great wave . . . of hope." [1]

So much for the past and the present ; this in brief is the history of the colour problem in recent times. First the domination of the white man over the coloured man, without opportunity of yea or nay ; then the coloured man's acquiescence in this domination, believing himself to be inferior to the white man, believing the white man to be further advanced in evolution than himself ; then, in the East, the coloured man's gradual disillusionment, and his demand for treatment as an equal ; at present, the white man's refusal of this demand. What of the future ? This question we cannot answer, but the following passionate plea by Annie Besant, speaking of India in particular, though the argument applies to other races and nations also, should at any rate enable every thoughtful white man, and coloured man too, to see what the future might be, if only the nations are brought to their senses in time:

" I would ask you all to consider—you who are members of the British nation, of the mightiest Empire left on the surface of the globe—I would ask you to remember that you alone among the nations of the world can solve the Colour Problem that is threatening civilisation to-day. You *can* do it if you will. You, with one white person to every six coloured persons in your Empire.

[1] Annie Besant, *World Problems of To-day* (London 1925), pp. 34–35.

Was ever before a nation given so mighty an opportunity of affecting the destinies of the world? Had ever such a little island as your own put before it so wonderful a destiny, so great a possibility? You, who might reconcile the coloured and the white races, and weld them together in bonds of equality, of mutual service! Oh, I would pray you who have learnt something at least of the possibilities hidden in the human heart and the human brain, to turn your brains and hearts to this problem of your Empire. Get rid of the very word 'Empire,' which has a connotation of force, of violence, of imposing itself on others; and take a nobler word, 'Commonwealth,' or the Federation of British Peoples, of Free Coloured Nations—realising that India is not lost to you, if you are willing to meet her on equal terms—a nation with strong heart and loving thought; a nation not full of the aggressive pride of nationality as some of the westerns are. I know that Indian nationality is said to be created by the British Empire; I read that India was never a nation until a foreign yoke was imposed upon her.

Do you know on what Indian nationality is founded? She has had many, many an empire before you; Hindu Empires, Musalman Empires; none of them interfered with her nationality. Your Empire is but a young one. How should that build those millions of coloured people into a consciousness of their own nationality? That comes down to them from their

length of history and their length of religion. Do you realise that the same great men, the same great saints, the same great sages, and the same great writers are recognised, and owned and reverenced in every part of India to-day? Indian nationhood rests on her history, on her heroes, on her saints, on her poets, and not on the short period of a few years in which your nation has dominated her.

Do you realise that every Indian in his daily prayers names the seven sacred cities of the One Land to which he gives his own name in India, of Bhâratavarsha, the lands of the Bhâratas; or Âryavarsha, the land of the Aryans? That these seven great cities are in the extreme north, and south and east and west and in the middle land, and these are daily repeated and speak of the unity of India in their religion, while varying in details, one in its consciousness, and that the One Life is appealed to by every Indian, no matter what his sect or devotional name may be? It is by Indian religion, Indian history, by her mighty past that stretches back into the night of time; it is by virtue of these that India claims to stand erect, as a nation before the nations, the younger nations of the West. And I tell you, if you will stretch out your hands to her, if you will cast aside prejudice, and ignorance, unworthy of your minds and hearts, of your feelings and your real good will to men; if you will not let a colour-bar block you; if you will not think that a white skin means superiority; if you will only realise that all the

world's greatest Teachers were clothed in the coloured skin that you despise ; oh, then, I can dream of a Commonwealth which shall make the Glory of the World ; wherein coloured men and white men shall stand together ; wherein each shall share with each, his own gains and his own advantages ; wherein there shall be no talk of force, no talk of a British garrison in India, for you will garrison her with amity, with comradeship, and with love that spans the ocean and binds both countries into one. Oh, take India's hands while they are still outstretched, though now doubtingly, hardly trusting you : grasp them now ! Then will the blessing of the future rest upon you, when the great fear of war between coloured and white has passed away from the minds of all nations ; and the name of Britain shall shine with a greater glory, shall be gemmed with nobler jewels of human love and adoration. Oh, cast not away the possibility of bequeathing to your own, to your children, to the latest generation, such a heritage ; a heritage of love, good will, power, unity and service, which shall mean the Peace of the World." [1]

[1] Annie Besant, *World Problems of To-day* (London 1925), pp. 44–46.

# CHAPTER VIII

## THEOSOPHY

THE attempt to summarise at second-hand Annie Besant's exposition of Theosophy, would be foredoomed to failure, were anyone so foolhardy as to make such an attempt. As well try to compress science into one page, history into another, and philosophy into a third, as to try and set out Annie Besant on Theosophy in one chapter. To do so would be as unsatisfactory to the reader as to the writer, and it has therefore been decided to leave this chapter entirely in Annie Besant's own words, with the addition of a few comments and footnotes, which have been enclosed in square brackets. The following pages are a reprint of what is not only probably the best brief statement of Theosophy ever made by Annie Besant, but one which is largely unknown and inaccessible in the heavy tomes of the "Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics," from the twelfth volume (1921) of which it is taken.

### "I. DEFINITION AND SCOPE

Every great religion has two parts, an inner and an outer, a spirit and a body, 'the knowledge

of God,' which 'is Eternal Life,' and its dogmas, rites, and ceremonies. The inner part, 'the wisdom of God in a mystery,' spoken of by St Paul as known to 'the perfect,' is that which has, since the 3rd century, been known in the West as 'theosophy'; in the East it has been known for ages under its Sanskrit equivalent *Brahma-vidyā*, 'God-wisdom.' 'God-knowledge,' or 'God-science.' Such theosophy, or mysticism, the direct knowledge of God by man, belongs equally to all great religions, as their sustaining life, and may be possessed by any individual, even outside any religious organization. The Brahmavadins, 'knowers of God,' in Hinduism; the Gnostics, the 'knowers,' who, Origen declared, were necessary to the very existence of the Christian Church; the *shaikh* in Islāmic Sūfism—these are typical theosophists from the standpoint of the modern Theosophical Society. No man is truly a theosophist who has not direct knowledge of God, but he may win this through any religion or by his own unaided efforts.

Theosophy, in the modern as in the ancient world, proclaims the possibility of such knowledge, as the inevitable result of the immanence of God. Man is essentially a spiritual being, his self, or spirit, being an emanation from the Universal Self, or Universal Spirit, God, as a ray is an emanation from the sun. Hence, to know himself, his deepest self, is to know God; he can sink in consciousness into the depths of his own being, beyond the body, the passions, the emo-

tions, the mind, the reason ; these are all his, but they are not he ; he can pass beyond them all, and realize himself as separate from them, the pure 'I', pure being. This is the universal experience of those who, successfully, seek the Kingdom of Heaven within, and it is followed by the recognition that this Universal Being into which the self opens transcends all the beings in which it is manifested, and is alike in all. Out of this experience, repeated for every one who becomes a knower of God, or theosophist, are built the two fundamental truths of theosophy : the immanence and transcendence of God, and the solidarity, or brotherhood, of all living beings. The realization of the first truth, man's identity of nature with God, as a fact in consciousness, and the subsequent realization of the second, his identity of nature with all around him, by a blending of his self with their self, a conscious dwelling in their forms as his own—these sum up theosophy in its fullest and deepest sense. The man who has thus reached self-realization in God, and in all beings is a theosophist ; those who deliberately aim at such self-realization are also generally called theosophists.

The word 'theosophy' has further, historically, a second meaning : it denotes a body of truths, or facts, concerning God, man, and the universe ; and these may conveniently be classified under three heads : religion, philosophy, and science. On these truths is based its system of ethics, rational, inspiring, and compelling. In considering this

body of truths we are not studying a system invented and published in modern days ; we have to do with what has aptly been termed the Wisdom-Tradition, handed down in all civilized countries, ancient and modern, by a long succession of prophets, teachers, and writers. It may be traced in the *Upanisads*, *Purānas*, and epics of the Hindus, and in the six systems (*darśanas*) of Hindu philosophy ; it underlies many of the Chinese systems, especially Taoism, and is seen in such books as *The Classic of Purity* and in the writings of Lao-tse ; it is found in Egypt, as in *The Book of the Dead* and the papyri from which its religion has been re-constructed ; it appears in the fragmentary records of Assyria and Chaldæa ; in the *Gāthas* and other scriptures of the Pārsīs ; in the Hebrew Scriptures as expounded by the Ḳabbālā and the Talmud ; in the Christian, as treated by the early Fathers of the Church, and by such Gnostic writers as Valentinus, Basilides, and a host of others ; in Pythagoras and Plato, with the Pythagorean, Platonic, and Neo-Platonic schools, with Plotinus, Iamblichus, and the theurgists ; it is taken up from these by the doctors of Islam and the Sufi mystics ; appears in the Rosicrucian students of alchemy and astrology, in Rosenkreutz, Paracelsus, Bruno, Eckartshausen, Boehme, Eckhart, Vaughan, Bacon, More, Fludd—all these and scores of others have assimilated and handed on the Wisdom-Tradition ; it has lent its symbols to masonry, and hidden some of its mysteries in

masonic ceremonies ; it peeps out of Scandinavian and Celtic folk-lore, out of the Hawaiian legends and Maori traditions, the unburied temples of the Mayas and Quiches, the magic of the Zuñis and other North American Indian tribes. Its revival and its systematization into a coherent and inter-related body of doctrines, separated from non-essential and irrelevant teachings—this is modern, and is the work of the Theosophical Society, a modern association. But the doctrines themselves are scattered everywhere, through all times, in all places.

The test to be applied to a religious doctrine which claims to be theosophical is catholicity. 'Semper, ubique, et ab omnibus'—such is the test. For all religions came from a single source, the Divine Wisdom, and have as founders divinely inspired men—men who have climbed up the ladder of evolution till they have reached perfection in humanity, and have entered on the superhuman evolution. Such men we call 'masters,' and we regard them as the guides and directors of the evolution of humanity ; the similarities in doctrines and ethics, pointed out by comparative mythology and comparative religion, we regard as due to the fact that all the founders of religions are members of the one lodge of masters, possess the same knowledge, and are guided by the same principles.

The universal—*i.e.* the theosophical—doctrines of religion are : the unity of God ; the manifestation of God as a Trinity for the building

of a universe ; the existence of graded orders of intelligences, a vast hierarchy of beings, forming the inhabitants, visible and invisible, of a universe, or a solar system. The doctrine of reincarnation, taught in every religion, though in some temporarily overlaid, belongs to the domain of philosophy rather than to that of religion ; the immortality or rather the eternity, of the spirit belongs also to philosophy more than to religion, when dealt with intellectually ; the law of action and reaction—*karma*—falls under science, as do the constitution of a solar system and of man.

## II. Religious Teachings

(*a*) *The unity of God*, the universal one Existence which is the source of all existences actual and potential, the super-life and super-consciousness in which all lives and consciousness inhere, eternal beneath the transitory, changeless beneath the fleeting, unsupported but the support of all, all-embracing, all-containing, the One without a second—this is the central teaching of theosophy as of all religions, the first universal truth of religion.

(*b*) *The Trinity of the manifested God* is the second great and universal truth of religion, and therefore of theosophy. Theosophy speaks of the manifested God as the Logos, borrowing the term from Plato, Philo, and the Fourth Gospel.

'Coming forth from the depths of the One Existence, from the One beyond all thought and

all speech, a Logos, by imposing on Himself a limit, circumscribing voluntarily the range of His own Being, becomes the Manifested God, and tracing the limiting sphere of His activity, thus outlines the area of His universe. Within that area the universe is born, is evolved, and dies ; it lives, it moves, it has its being in Him ; its matter is His breath ; its forces and energies are currents of His life ; He is immanent in every atom ; all-pervading ; all-sustaining ; all-evolving ; He is its source and its end, its cause and its object, its centre and circumference ; it is built on Him as its sure foundation, it breathes in Him as its encircling space ; He is in everything, and everything in Him. Thus have the Sages of the Ancient Wisdom taught us of the beginning of the manifested worlds. From the same source we learn of the Self-unfolding of the Logos into a threefold form ; the First Logos, the Root of all Being, the *Will* which outbreathes and inbreathes the worlds ; from Him the Second Logos, manifesting the two aspects of life and form, the primal-duality, making the two poles of nature between which the web of the universe is to be woven—life-form, spirit-matter, positive-negative, active-receptive, Father-Mother of the Worlds—the *Wisdom*, or Pure Reason, " mightily and sweetly ordering all things," sustaining the universe ; the Third Logos, the Universal Active or Creative *Mind*, that in which all archetypically exists, the source of beings, the fount of fashioning energies, the treasure-house in which are stored up all the

archetypal forms which are to be brought forth and elaborated in matter during the evolution of the universe, the fruits of past universes, brought over as seeds for the present.' [1]

(*c*) *The hierarchy of beings* is the third truth universally accepted : the 'seven spirits before the throne of God' ; the primary emanations of the Supreme Trinity ; the ranks of secondary Logoi, who rule congeries of solar systems, down to the Logos of a single solar system. In such a system the vast hosts of spiritual intelligences (the *devas*, archangels, and angels of religions), the grades of spirits encased in human bodies, the sub-human intelligences and those not yet even awakened to intelligence—all these, with the solar Logos at their head, form the ladder of lives, and evolve within the system. The sub-human intelligences include all nature-spirits, the gnomes, fairies, etc., who play so great a part in folk-lore, the living though limited intelligences who make all nature a living responsive organism instead of a soulless mechanism, whom little children sometimes see, and who are visible to the ordinary seer.

(*d*) The fourth truth in theosophy is that of *universal brotherhood*, the inevitable deduction from the preceding ; since there is but one life in all forms, all forms must be inter-related, linked together, and, however unequal they may be in development, they none the less make one huge

[1] [Annie Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom* (London 1897), pp. 41–42, with minor alterations, by the author herself, of course.]

family, are 'of one blood.' The universal brotherhood of theosophy differs from the political conception of 'equality,' the foundation of modern democracy, in that it postulates identity of origin and of potentiality, but recognises varying degrees of development, the latter yielding the hierarchy of beings, or ladder of lives. In this freemasonry resembles it, with its broad division of mankind into the enlightened and the profane, and the subdivisions of the enlightened into degrees and graded officers, uniting the essential equality with the hierarchical order and due subordination. In this both theosophy and freemasonry are in harmony with nature, increasing power going hand-in-hand with increasing knowledge and increasing responsibility. Wisdom, supported by strength and made manifest in beauty, rules in a true brotherhood, as in nature.

It is interesting to note that these four primary religious truths of theosophy, of universal religion, are but the intellectual formulation—for the instruction of the people—of the two primary spiritual truths directly contacted by the knower of God, the gnostic, the theosophist. The first three are religious dogmas, expressing intellectually the first spiritual truth ; the fourth is the expression in the outer life of the second spiritual truth. The spiritual truths can be *known* only by individual self-realization ; they may be intellectually taught and believed as the fundamental dogmas of universal religion, theosophy. A dogma is the intellectual presentment of a truth

known by the spirit, and believed on external authority.

### III. Philosophical Teachings

Philosophically, theosophy is idealistic ; consciousness is primary, the one indubitable fact, which can neither be strengthened nor weakened by argument. 'I am' is the testimony of consciousness to itself, and nought can disprove its witness, since every disproof, every argument, must be addressed to that same consciousness, and imply its existence. To the All-self, matter is but the limitations imposed by Himself on His thoughts ; to us, evolving in a universe which is the manifestation of our Logos, matter is His thought, limitations imposed on us by His thought and activity—limitations which we cannot transcend until we can realize ourselves in Him. Human thought, though feeble and undeveloped, is of the same nature as divine thought, and increases its power over matter with its increasing growth ; thought is the one creative and moulding power, and, as evolving man realizes this, and so clarifies his lower nature that this aspect of the self can work through it, he becomes the master of that lower nature and of his surroundings, the creator and controller of his destiny. By thought, mastering the science of physical nature, he bends it to his will and utilizes it ; by thought, mastering the science of the emotions, he builds virtues and destroys vices ; by thought, mastering the science of mind, he subdues its turbulent energies into

orderly obedience ; by thought, directing will and controlling activity, he brings all things, within and without, into subjection to the self, 'the inner ruler, immortal.' Only by such fit rule and due subjection can man attain perfect health of body, emotions, and mind, and reach the highest good. Hence many of the practical theosophical teachings deal with this power and control of thought.

The eternity of spirit—more loosely spoken of as the immortality of the soul—is an integral part of theosophical philosophy. It is an inevitable deduction from the identity of nature of the human and the universal Self ; 'unborn, undying, perpetual,' it is eternal as God Himself. The continuity of consciousness is equally inevitable, since the self is conscious and continuous, and in the self must consequently abide all its experiences, of which a successive survey is memory. The extent to which these memories are carried on by the material sheaths, or bodies, of the self—*i.e.* the survival of the individual and the person—will be better considered under the constitution of man.

The method of the unfolding of this continuous and conscious self in the human kingdom is by reincarnation. Reincarnation is, in fact, the only doctrine of immortality that philosophy can look at, as Hume said.[1] It means that the self, having

[1] [David Hume, "Of the Immortality of the Soul," *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, ed. by T. H. Green and T. H. Grote (London 1875–1878), iv. 404.]

unfolded to the human stage, appropriates matter from the three worlds (see below) and builds it into bodies, suitable for life in those worlds, beginning in the stage of barbarism, as a savage of a low type. During earth-life he gathers experiences, pleasant and painful ; after death he meets the results of these experiences—the lower in the intermediate world, where he suffers in the appropriate body of matter belonging to that world, and converts all these experiences into mental and moral capacities. When all are thus converted, he returns to earth-life, bringing with him these capacities wrought out of experiences, into new bodies built to express and utilize them. In these he goes through a similar cycle, gathering, suffering, transmuting, and so on and on ; each birth brings the fruitage of the preceding lives to start the new pilgrimage, and this is the inborn character and temperament, mental, moral, physical. Step by step he climbs the ladder, working under inflexible and inviolable laws, until he reaches the stature of the perfect man ; he passes through all the classes of the school of life until he has mastered all that this world has to teach, and is *asekha*—he who has no more to learn. He is then a man, beyond birth and death, ' fitted for immortality,' ready for work in the larger life.

## IV. Scientific Teachings

Theosophy differs from modern science in the fact that it includes under ' science ' investigations

into superphysical worlds. Its methods are the same : investigation by observation of objective phenomena, reasoning on observations, framing of hypotheses, discovery of invariable sequences (*i.e.* of natural laws), repeated experiments to verify deductions, and formulation of results. It uses the senses for observation, but the senses intensified—super-senses, in fact—responding to vibrations of matter finer than that which affects the physical senses.

As with modern science, so with theosophical—'occult science,' it is usually called—there is a body of accepted facts, laid down by recognized experts and largely reverified by later experiments, and a fringe of modern discoveries, constantly added to, revised, and modified. The accepted facts have been established by generations of occult experts, and their existence is often referred to in the scriptures of various religions ; the more accessible of these are being constantly reverified by occult students to-day, but the larger cosmological facts are beyond our reach. Any discoveries made by students are subject to revision and modification, as observations are repeated and the instruments of observation are improved.

(*a*) *The constitution of the universe.* The broad outline of this comes from the seers of the past, and is largely confirmed in the scriptures. It appears reasonable to us, and is congruous with the observations which we are able to make. The laws of analogy and recapitulation confirm

it, for we see its outlines repeated in miniature within our own range of observation, and we see sequences rapidly repeated in miniature which the seers have described as occurring in a universe—as the æonian evolution of the kingdoms of nature is mimicked in the growth of the embryo in the womb. A universe consists of seven kinds of matter, or planes, of which the densest is called physical or solid ; the next finer, astral, or watery ; the next, mental or fiery ; the next, spiritual or airy ; the next, superspiritual or ethereal ; and the two finest, divine. What are called solar systems are all on the physical plane of the universe, and a solar system repeats within itself the seven kinds or states of matter, these subdivisions of the vast cosmic plane forming its planes, or worlds.

Within a solar system these subdivisions can be mostly studied by less developed seers, and we are in a field of research open to the occult student of our own day. We find in relation to our own earth : ' physical matter,' all formed by aggregations of similar physical atoms, similar except that some are positive, some negative ; these aggregations are grouped into solids, liquids, gases, and three kinds of ethers ; ' astral matter,' formed by aggregations of astral atoms, differing from physical atoms in shape, and grouped into states corresponding to the physical ; ' mental matter,' formed by aggregations of mental atoms, again distinguishable by their form, and again grouped as before ; the ' spiritual ' and ' superspiritual

worlds ' are formed on the same plan, each having its own type of atom and its own corresponding states of aggregation. Of the ' divine worlds ' we cannot directly speak.

(*b*) *The constitution of man* is analogous to that of the solar system, and hence the possibility of knowledge concerning it. As said, he is a fragment of the Universal Self, and he is clothed in the matter of his system. In the divine world dwells his true self, the monad, and his consciousness appropriates matter from each of the five worlds below in order that he may know and conquer them ; as the continuing ' I,' he uses matter from the superspiritual, spiritual, and the finer regions of the mental world ; this is the ' spiritual body ' of which St Paul speaks ; it grows and evolves through the whole cycle of reincarnation, and beyond, but is not changed or lost in birth or death ; probably St Paul refers to this when he speaks of our ' house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,' which he says ' we have.' It is this spirit in the spiritual body which is the reincarnating Ego, or individual, though the term is often used to indicate only the consciousness working in the finer mental matter, in what is termed ' the causal body,' a subdivision of the spiritual taken separately. When the reincarnating Ego takes a new birth, he appropriates some of the coarser matter of the mental world for his ' mental body,' some of the matter of the astral world for his ' astral body,' some of the matter of the physical world for his ' physical body ' ; his

consciousness, in thinking, uses mental matter ; in desiring or sensating, uses astral matter ; in acting in the physical world, uses physical matter ; these are ' the three worlds ' in which his evolution goes on, and in which he is affected by birth and death, and is a personality, or person, *i.e.* the individual, as limited in expression by grosser matter ; the mental body is closely related to the brain, though not dependent on it, save for activity in the physical world ; the astral body is mainly correlated with the cerebro-spinal and sympathetic ganglia and nerves, and the glands ; the three bodies interpenetrate each other, mutually acting and reacting throughout waking life. In sleep consciousness withdraws from the physical body, clothed still in its astral and mental garments, living then in the astral world, and sometimes, on its return, impressing on the physical brain some of its experiences in vivid and coherent ' dreams ' ; it keeps in magnetic touch with its physical body. In death this magnetic touch is broken off, and the consciousness dwells for a while in the astral world, called often ' the intermediate world,' in relation to those who have passed away from earth. After a while the astral body dies, and the man passes in the mental body into the mental world, or heaven, where he abides for a period extending to many centuries, the length depending chiefly on the richness of his intellectual, emotional, and artistic past life on earth. When he has assimilated all the experiences of this nature accumulated on

earth, the mental body disintegrates, the consciousness withdraws to the spiritual body with all it has gathered to enrich the Ego. Then the Ego builds a set of new bodies for a new pilgrimage in the three worlds, and returns to them by birth. Thus the evolution of man is carried on in three worlds, brooded over by the spirit—himself—the spirit garnering the results and unfolding thereby; he is an inhabitant of the three during waking life ; of two during sleep and for a period after death ; of one during his heavenly life. The lowest, the physical body, is at present the most perfectly organized, and therefore the most capable of receiving impressions from without and transmitting them to the consciousness. The astral body is rapidly becoming organized, and its proper senses are developing, so that it is receiving and transmitting many impressions from the astral world, though generally with a lack of sharpness and accuracy ; these include the phenomena of second-sight, premonitions, warnings, visions, perception of phantasms of the living and the dead, etc.—the phenomena to which modern psychology is paying so much attention. An increasing number of people are 'sensitive,' or 'psychic,' and are using the supersenses, *i.e.* the senses of the astral body, more or less consciously. The mental body is becoming well organized in educated people, but move in relation to its organ, the brain, than as an independent vehicle of consciousness, active in its own world. Consciousness, in the mental body,

is in-turned rather than outward-turned. The occultist, having by the practice of special methods—meditation, concentration, etc.—artificially forced the evolution of the astral and mental bodies beyond the normal, is, as regards these, many centuries ahead of his time ; he uses the supersenses for life in the astral and mental worlds in his waking consciousness, and thus carries on his investigations in them as the physical scientist does in the physical world. The dying of the three bodies, and the building of new ones for each successive life-period, is the cause of the loss of memory of past lives ; that memory is in the reincarnating Ego, and is shared by the consciousness when animating the lower bodies only if, in those bodies, the man has realized himself as one with the higher.

(*c*) *The law of action and reaction* is universal, and exists in the worlds of emotion, thought, and spirit as much as in the physical world. Hence a man can build his character as scientifically as he can build up his body, and disregard of the mental and moral laws is as destructive of mental and moral health as disregard of physical laws is destructive of physical health. The study and utilizing of the laws, summed up as *karma*, forms an important part of theosophical work.

(*d*) *Evolution*. The monad gradually unfolds his powers by coming into touch with matter and appropriating portions of it ; he thus passes through the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, until in a highly developed animal the

intelligence reaches the human stage ; thenceforward reincarnation under *karma* is his means of unfolding. Humanity, on our globe, takes on a fresh type—more delicately organized as to the nervous system—that of a root-race, when a considerable number of reincarnating Egos are ready to develop a higher quality of consciousness. The third, or Lemurian, race, was the first to assume the really human type in the middle period of its evolution—the previous types being embryonic ; the surviving remnants of the Lemurian are the negroes and the many negroid peoples scattered over the world. The fourth, or Atlantean, race with its seven sub-races—of which the Toltec, Akkadian, Turanian, and Mongolian peoples are typical—is still the most numerous. The fifth, or Aryan, race has already five sub-races—the Aryans of India, the Mediterranean Aryans (Arabs, the later higher class Egyptians, etc.), the Iranians, Celts, and Teutons—and has yet to develop two more. These varying types afford to the reincarnating Egos the necessary varieties for their evolution, each Ego taking birth in the races and sub-races as often as is necessary for the unfolding of the qualities characteristic of each.

(*e*) *Human perfection.* By repeated reincarnations under inviolable law, each man reaping exactly as he has sown, man reaches his temporary goal—human perfection. At the present stage of evolution it is possible for him to reach this goal in advance of the evolutionary term, which

will last yet for many millions of years. By strenuous exertions and noble and unselfish living, he may attract the attention of the spiritual guardians of mankind, who will teach him how to quicken his evolution, so that he may enter on 'the path of holiness,' pass through its five initiations—or stages of widening consciousness —and become a 'master,' the last of the five initiations opening the gateway of superhuman evolution. He may then pass into other worlds, or enter the ranks of the guardians of this world, as he wills. From the hierarchy of these guardians have come the founders of world-religions, the lesser prophets and teachers being their disciples.

## V. The Ethics of Theosophy

These are not definitely formulated into any code, but consist of the highest and purest teachings of the world's noblest saints, prophets, and founders of religions. All that is sweetest and most lofty in the world's Bibles, all that is most inspiring and ennobling in the writings of its philosophers and moralists, forms the ethics of theosophy. As man lives by the highest ethic he can grasp, he becomes capable of appreciating ethic yet sublimer ; the theosophist strives to live by the spirit of Christ rather than by any legal code, and, cultivating love, he hopes to be enlightened by the lords of love. Broadly speak-

ing, that which works with the Divine Will in evolution is right ; that which works against it is wrong ; and the best examples of that will are found in such divine men as the Buddha and the Christ. These the theosophist looks up to as examples, and strives to reproduce their likeness in himself.

## VI. The Theosophical Society

This association was founded on the 17th of November, 1875, in New York City, U.S.A., by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steele Olcott. The former was a Russian noble-woman, of extraordinary psychic endowments, and these had been trained and cultivated to the highest point by her 'master,' an Eastern occultist ; she gave up social rank, wealth, and family to seek him in Tibet, and spent some years with him near Shigatze, after which, returning to the world, she gave the rest of her life to carrying out his directions. In America she met, at the famous Eddy farmhouse, a man who had won high distinction during the Civil War, Colonel Henry Steele Olcott, and he became her pupil. She endeavoured first to collaborate with the American spiritualists, but, failing in this, she, with Olcott, founded the Theosophical Society ; she became its corresponding secretary, an office which she held for many years, and he its president ; its organization is due to him, and he remained

president until his death in 1907, when the present writer was elected as his successor.[1]

The unit of organization is a lodge, of not less than seven members ; when a number of lodges, not less than seven, exist in any territory, they may group themselves into a section, or national society, which is self-governing, within the wide limits of the general constitution. The central ruling body consists of president, vice-president, treasurer, recording secretary, a general council consisting of the general secretaries, each elected by his own national society, with not less than five additional councillors, chosen by the general secretaries. It meets once a year and deals only with matters affecting the whole Society ; but it may not meddle with the business of the sections, unless there be a transgression of the general constitution. The annual report of 1917 showed 19 national societies, 1074 lodges, with 28,673 active members.[2] Round each lodge are gathered a considerable number of sympathizers and helpers, but these are not entered on the rolls. The headquarters of the Society were first in New York ; in 1879 the founders left America for India, and fixed the headquarters in Bombay ; in December, 1882, they moved to Adyar, a suburb of Madras, and there the headquarters have since remained. The Theosophical Society owns there

[1] [Annie Besant has remained President since that date, having been twice re-elected by overwhelming majorities.]

[2] [The latest available figures are those for 1925, the jubilee year of the Society ; at the end of that year there were 41 national societies, 1571 lodges, and 41,645 members.]

an estate of 266 acres, with several fine buildings, and a library which is known all over the world of scholarship as possessing the finest existing collection of *Upaniṣads*, as well as some unique Sanskrit MSS.

While the Society exists for the purpose of spreading the ideas formulated above, it does not impose belief in them on its members, who, provided they accept the principle of universal brotherhood, are absolutely free to think as they will. Admission to membership is obtained on recommendation of two Fellows of the Society, and the acceptance of the following objects :

'To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.

To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science.

To investigate the unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.'

The following, written many years ago by the present president [that is, Annie Besant], states the general position of the Theosophical Society.

'The Theosophical Society is composed of students, belonging to any religion in the world or to none, who are united by their approval of the above objects, by their wish to remove religious antagonisms, and to draw together men of good will, whatsoever their religious opinions, and by their desire to study religious truths and to share the results of their studies with others. Their bond of union is not the profession of a

common belief, but a common search and aspiration for Truth. They hold that Truth should be sought by study, by reflexion, by purity of life, by devotion to high ideals, and they regard Truth as a prize to be striven for, not as a dogma to be imposed by authority. They consider that belief should be the result of individual study or intuition and not its antecedent, and should rest on knowledge, not on assertion. They extend tolerance to all, even to the intolerant, not as a privilege they bestow, but as a duty they perform, and they seek to remove ignorance, not to punish it. They see every religion as an expression of the Divine Wisdom, and prefer its study to its condemnation, and its practice to proselytism. Peace is their watchword as Truth is their aim.

Theosophy is the body of truths which forms the basis of all religions, and which cannot be claimed as the exclusive possession of any. It offers a philosophy which renders life intelligible, and which demonstrates the justice and the love which guide evolution. It puts death in its rightful place as a recurring incident in an endless life, opening the gateway of a fuller and more radiant existence. It restores to the world the Science of the Spirit, teaching man to know the Spirit as himself, and the mind and body as his servants. It illuminates the Scriptures and doctrines of religions by unveiling their hidden meanings, and thus justifying them at the bar of intelligence, as they are ever justified in the eyes of intuition.

Members of the Theosophical Society study these truths, and Theosophists endeavour to live them. Every one willing to study, to be tolerant, to aim high, and to work perseveringly, is welcomed as a member, and it rests with the member to become a true Theosophist.[1]

[As the Theosophical Society has spread far and wide over the civilized world, and as members of all religions have become members of it, without surrendering the special dogmas, teachings and beliefs, of their respective faiths, it is thought desirable to emphasize the fact that there is no doctrine, no opinion, by whomsoever taught or held, that is in any way binding on any member of the Society, none which any member is not free to accept or reject. Approval of its three objects is the sole condition of membership. No teacher or writer, from H. P. Blavatsky downwards, has any authority to impose his teachings or opinions on members. Every member has an equal right to attach himself to any teacher or to any school of thought which he may choose, but has no right to force his choice on any other. Neither a candidate for any office, nor any voter, can be rendered ineligible to stand or vote because of any opinion he may hold, or because of membership in any school of thought to which he may belong. Opinions or beliefs neither bestow privileges nor inflict penalties. The Members of the General Council earnestly request every member of the

[1] [These lines have since been adopted as a statement of the Society's principles, with the addition of the paragraph that follows.]

Theosophical Society to maintain, defend and act upon these fundamental principles of the Society, and also fearlessly to exercise his own liberty of thought and of expression thereof, within the limits of courtesy and consideration for others.]

There have been some offshoots from the Theosophical Society which have become independent of the central organisation, but which spread the same truths. There are two international societies, with headquarters in America, and some scattered independent bodies in Germany and Austria.'

Annie Besant's writings on Theosophy are very numerous, and the following list is only a selection of books, to the exclusion of pamphlets and other shorter publications. They are arranged as far as possible under the above classification, and in chronological order of first publication.

I. and VI. THEOSOPHY AND THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN GENERAL: *The Ancient Wisdom* (London 1897), *Ancient Ideals in Modern Life* (London and Benares, 1901), *Theosophy in Relation to Human Life* (Benares and London, 1905), *London Lectures* (London and Benares, 1907), *Australian Lectures* (Sydney 1908), *The Changing World* (London 1909), *Popular Lectures on Theosophy* (Benares and London [1910]), *Essays and Addresses* (London 1911–1913, 4 vols.), *The Ideals of Theosophy* (Adyar 1912), *Theosophy* (The People's Books, London [1912]), *An Introduction to Theosophy* (Adyar 1913), *Theosophy and the*

*Theosophical Society* (Adyar 1912), *Theosophy and Life's Deeper Problems* (Adyar 1916), *Duties of the Theosophist* (Adyar 1917), *Talks with a Class* (Madras and London, 1921), *Brahmavidya* (Adyar 1923), *The Theosophical Society and the Occult Hierarchy* (London 1925).

II. and V. Religious and Ethical Teachings : *The Bhagavad-Gîtâ* [translation] (London 1895 ; also, with text, literal translation and grammar, in collaboration with Bhagavan Das, London and Benares, 1905), *In the Outer Court* (London 1895), *Four Great Religions* (London [1897]), *The Three Paths to Union with God* (Benares 1897), *Avâtaras* (London 1900), *Esoteric Christianity* (London and Benares, 1901), *The Laws of the Higher Life* (London 1903), *Hints on the Study of the Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (Benares and London, 1906), *The Wisdom of the Upaniṣhaṭs* (Benares and London, 1907), *Buddhist Popular Lectures* (Adyar 1908), *Questions on Hinduism with Answers* (Benares [1909 ?]), *The Religious Problem in India* (Madras 1909), *Initiation* (London 1912), *Superhuman Men in History and Religion* (London 1913), *Mysticism* (London 1914), *In Defence of Hinduism* (Adyar 1919), *Theosophical Christianity* (London 1922), *Talks on the Path of Occultism* (with C. W. Leadbeater, Adyar 1926).

III. Philosophical Teachings : *Reincarnation* (London 1894), *The Birth and Evolution of the Soul* (London 1895), *Karma* (London 1895), *Dharma* (Benares 1899), *Thought Power* (London and Benares, 1901), *A Study in Consciousness*

(London and Benares, 1904), *Theosophy and the New Psychology* (London and Benares, 1904), *An Introduction to Yoga* (Benares and London, 1908), *A Study in Karma* (Adyar [1912]), *The Great Plan* (Adyar 1921), *Britain's Place in the Great Plan* (London 1921).

IV. Scientific Teachings: *The Seven Principles of Man* (London 1892), *The Building of the Kosmos* (Madras 1894), *The Self and its Sheaths* (Benares 1895), *Man and his Bodies* (London 1896), *Evolution of Life and Form* (Madras 1899), *The Pedigree of Man* (Benares and London, 1904), *Thought-Forms* (with C. W. Leadbeater, London and Benares, 1905), *Occult Chemistry* (with C. W. Leadbeater, Adyar [1909]), *Man: Whence, How and Whither* (with C. W. Leadbeater, Adyar and Benares, 1913), *Man's Life in This and Other Worlds* (Adyar 1913), *Man's Life in Three Worlds* (Adyar 1919), *The Inner Government of the World* (Adyar 1920), *The Lives of Alcyone* (with C. W. Leadbeater, Adyar 1924, 2 vols.).

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